

The Paris Review

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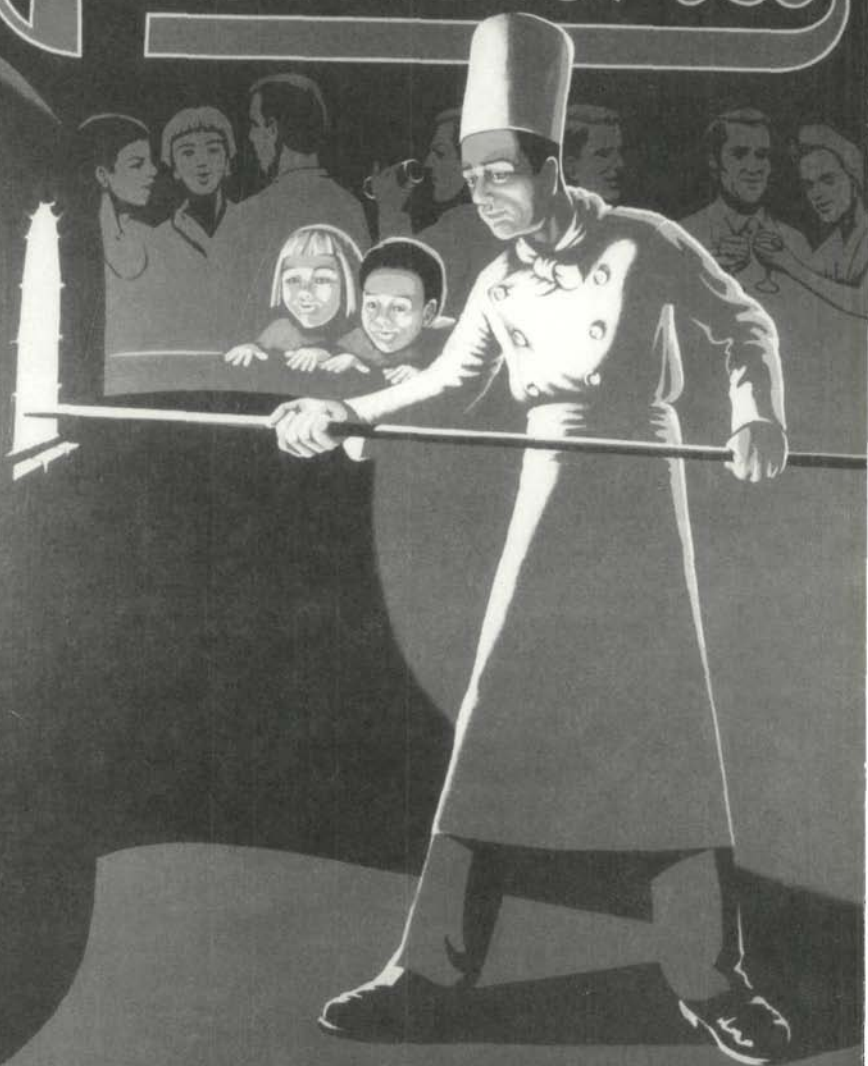
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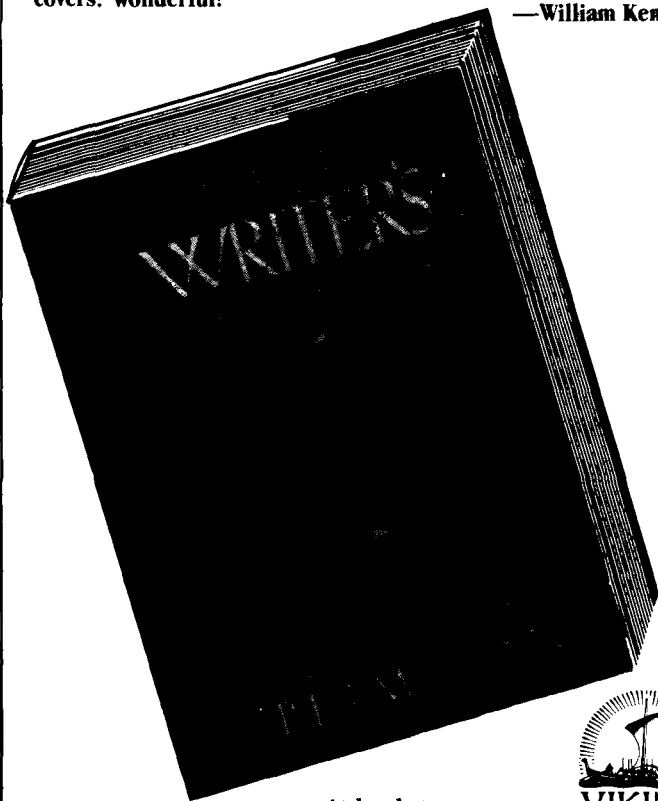
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and the nearly right word is the same
as that between lightning and the
lightning bug."
--Mark Twain**

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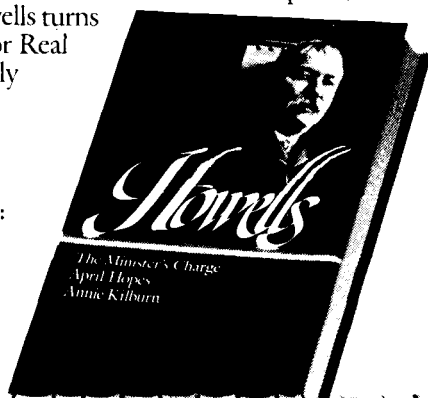
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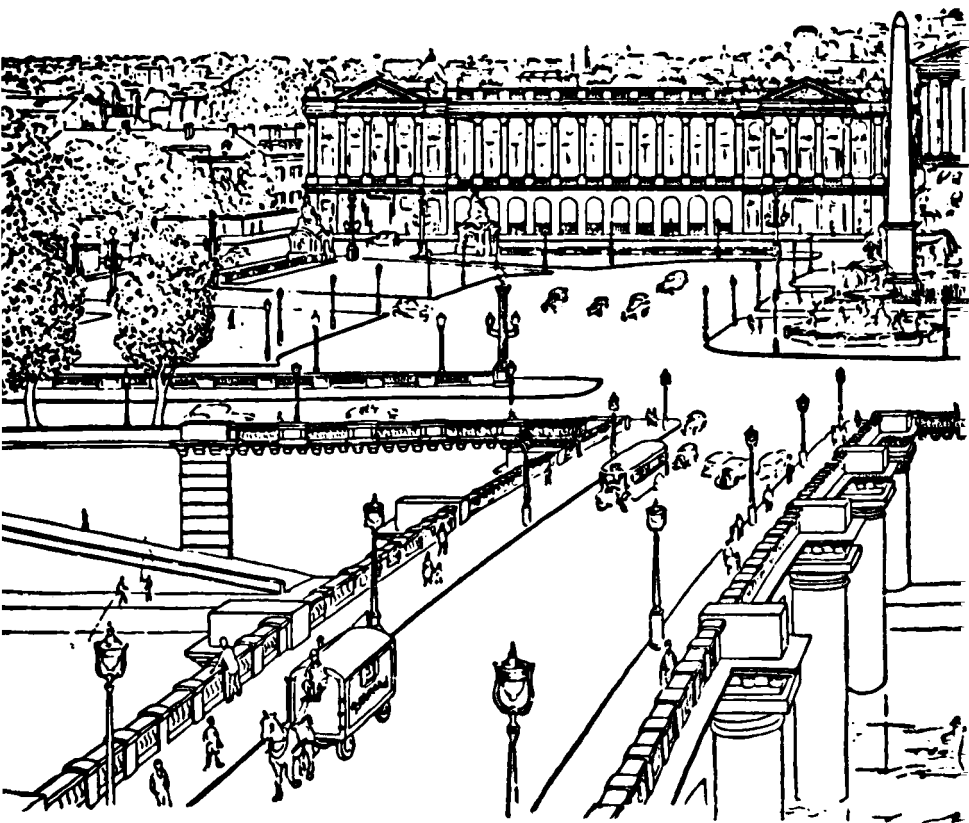
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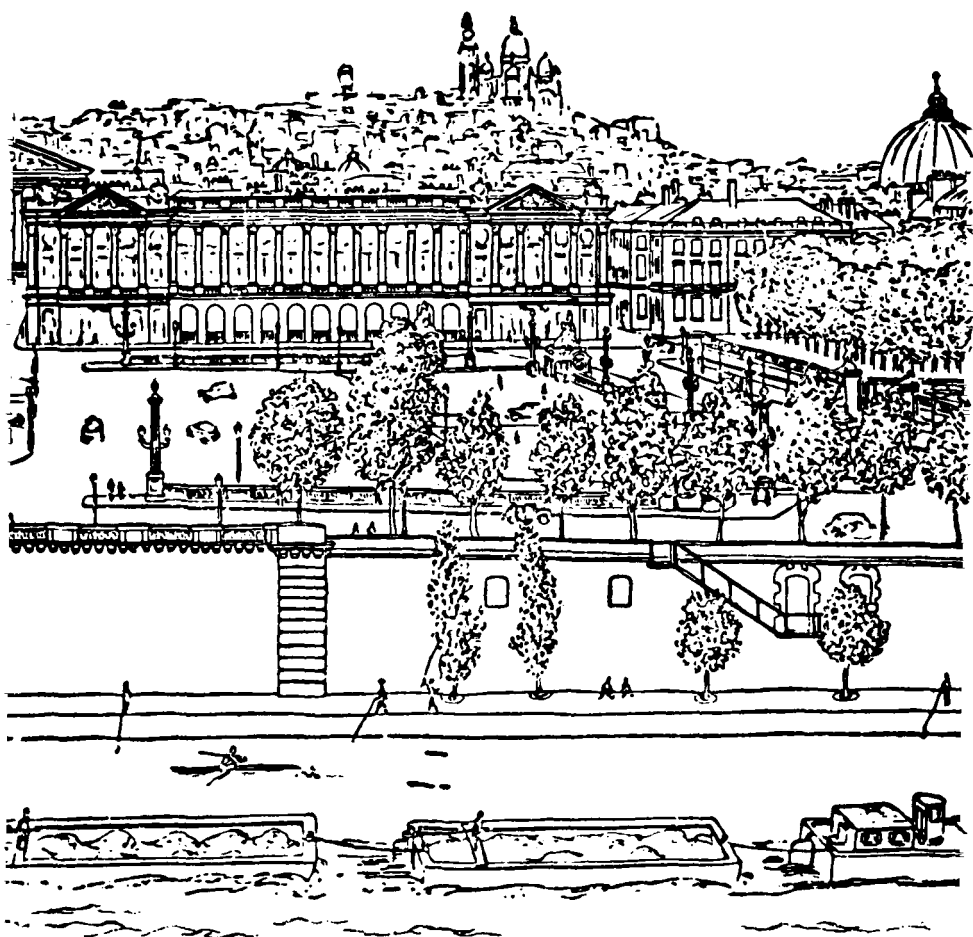
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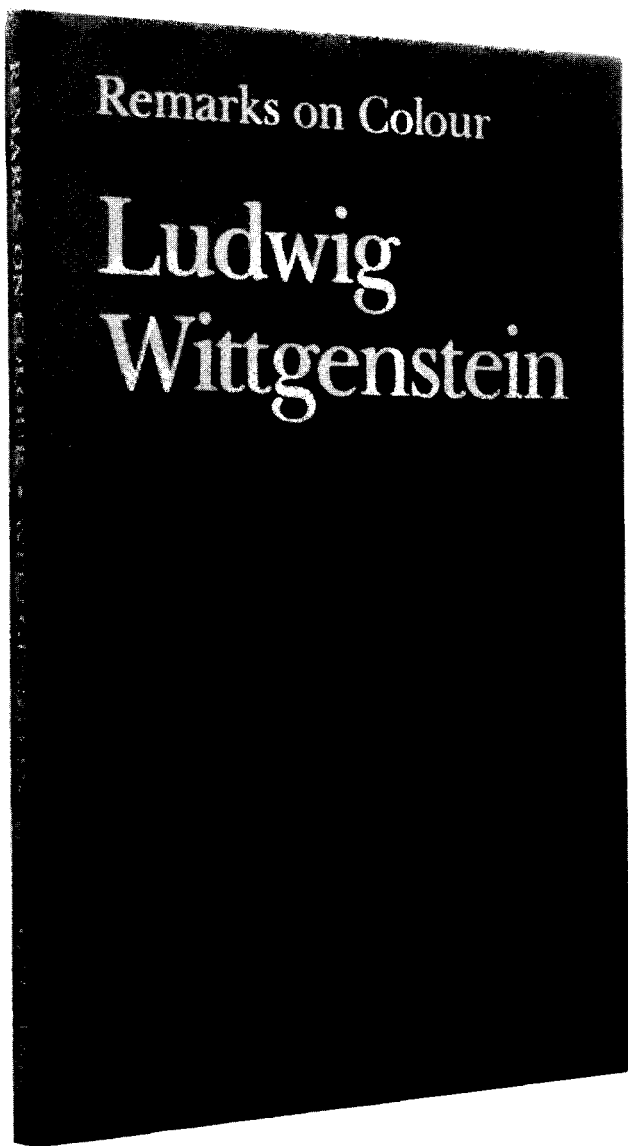
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The Elevator

Bernard Malamud

Eleonora was an Umbrian girl whom the portiere's wife had brought up to the Agostinis' first-floor apartment after their two unhappy experiences with Italian maids, not long after they had arrived in Rome from Chicago. She was about twenty-three, thin, and with bent bony shoulders which she embarrassedly characterized as *gobbo*—hunchbacked. But she was not unattractive and had an interesting profile, George Agostini thought. Her full face was not so interesting; like the portinaia's, also an Umbrian, it was too broad and round, and her left brown eye was slightly wider than her right. It also looked sadder than her right eye.

She was an active girl, always moving in her noisy slippers at a half trot across the marble floors of the furnished two-bedroom apartment, getting things done without having to be told, and handling the two children very well. After the second girl was let go, George had wished they didn't have to be bothered with a full-time, live-in maid. He had suggested that maybe Grace ought to go back to sharing the signora's maid—their landlady across the hall—for three hours a day, paying her on an hourly basis, as they had when they first moved in

after a rough month of apartment hunting. But when George mentioned this, Grace made a gesture of tearing her red hair, so he said nothing more. It wasn't that he didn't want her to have the girl—she certainly needed one with all the time it took to shop in six or seven stores instead of one supermarket, and she was even without a washing machine with all the kids' things to do; but George felt he wasn't comfortable with a maid always around. He didn't like people waiting on him, or watching him eat. George was heavy, and sensitive about it. He also didn't like her standing back to let him enter a room first. He didn't want her saying, "Comanda," the minute he spoke her name. Furthermore he wasn't happy about the tiny maid's room the girl lived in, nor her sinkless bathroom, with its cramped sitzbath, and no water heater. Grace, whose people had always been much better off than his, said everybody in Italy had maids and he would get used to it. George hadn't got used to the first two girls, but he did find that Eleonora bothered him less. He liked her more as a person and felt sorry for her. She looked as though she had more on her back than her bent shoulders.

One afternoon about a week and a half after Eleonora had come to them, when George arrived home from the FAO office where he worked, during the long lunch break, Grace said the maid was in her room, crying.

"What for?" George said, worried.

"I don't know."

"Didn't you ask her?"

"Sure I did, but all I could gather was that she's had a sad life. You're the linguist around here, why don't you ask her?"

"What are you so annoyed about?"

"Because I feel like a fool, frankly, not knowing what it's all about."

"Tell me what happened."

"She came out of the hall crying, about an hour ago," Grace said. "I had sent her up to the roof with a bundle of wash to do in one of the tubs up there instead of our bathtub, so she doesn't have to lug the heavy wet stuff up to the lines on the roof but can hang it out right away. Anyway, she wasn't gone

five minutes before she was back crying, and that was when she answered me about her sad life. I wanted to tell her I have a sad life too. We've been in Rome close to two months and I haven't even been able to see St. Peter's. When will I ever see anything?"

"Let's talk about her," George said. "Do you know what happened in the hall?"

"I told you I didn't. After she came back, I went down to the ground floor to talk to the portinaia—she has some smattering of English—and she told me that Eleonora had been married but had lost her husband. He died or something when she was eighteen. Then she had a baby by another guy who didn't stay around long enough to see if he recognized it, and that, I suppose, is why she finds life so sad."

"Did the portinaia say whether the kid is still alive?" George asked.

"Yes. She keeps it in a convent school."

"Maybe that's what got her down," he suggested. "She thinks of her kid being away from her and then feels bad."

"So she starts to cry in the hall?"

"Why not in the hall? Why not anywhere so long as you feel like crying? Maybe I ought to talk to her."

Grace nodded. Her face was flushed, and George knew she was troubled.

He went into the corridor and knocked on the door of the maid's room. "Permesso," George said.

"Prego." Eleonora had been lying on the bed but was respectfully on her feet when George entered. He could see she had been crying. Her eyes were red and her face pale. She looked scared, and George's throat went dry.

"Eleonora, I am sorry to see you like this," he said in Italian. "Is there something either my wife or I can do to help you?"

"No, Signore," she said quietly.

"What happened to you out in the hall?"

Her eyes glistened but she held back the tears. "Nothing. One feels like crying, so she cries. Do these things have a reason?"

"Are you satisfied with conditions here?" George asked her.

"Yes."

"If there is something we can do for you, I want you to tell us."

"Please don't trouble yourself about me." She lifted the bottom of her skirt, at the same time bending her head to dry her eyes on it. Her bare legs were hairy but shapely.

"No trouble at all," George said. He closed the door softly.

"Let her rest," he said to Grace.

"Damn! Just when I have to go out."

But in a few minutes Eleonora came out and went on with her work in the kitchen. They said nothing more and neither did she. Then at three George left for the office, and Grace put on her hat and went off to her Italian class and then to St. Peter's.

That night when George got home from work, Grace called him into their bedroom and said she now knew what had created all the commotion that afternoon. First the signora, after returning from an appointment with her doctor, had bounded in from across the hall, and Grace had gathered from the hot stew the old woman was in that she was complaining about their maid. The portinaia then happened to come up with the six o'clock mail, and the signora laced into her for bringing an inferior type of maid into the house. Finally when the signora had left, the portinaia told Grace that the old lady had been the one who had made Eleonora cry. She had apparently forbidden the girl to use the elevator. She would listen behind the door and as soon as she heard someone putting the key into the elevator lock, she would fling open her door, and if it was Eleonora, as she had suspected, she would cry out, "The key is not for you. The key is not for you." She would stand in front of the elevator, waving her arms to prevent her from entering. "Use the stairs," she cried, "the stairs are for walking. There is no need to fly, or God would have given you wings."

"Anyway," Grace went on, "Eleonora must have been outwitting her or something, because what she would do, according to the portinaia, was go upstairs to the next floor and call the elevator from there. But today the signora got suspicious

and followed Eleonora up the stairs. She gave her a bad time up there. When she blew in here before, Eleonora got so scared that she ran to her room and locked the door. The signora said she would have to ask us not to give our girl the key anymore. She shook her keys at me."

"What did you say after that?" George asked.

"Nothing. I wasn't going to pick a fight with her even if I could speak the language. A month of hunting apartments was enough for me."

"We have a lease," said George.

"Leases have been broken."

"She wouldn't do it—she needs the money."

"I wouldn't bet on it," said Grace.

"It burns me up," George said. "Why shouldn't the girl use the elevator to lug the clothes up to the roof? Five floors is a long haul."

"Apparently none of the other girls do," Grace said. "I saw one of them carrying a basket of wash up the stairs on her head."

"They ought to join the acrobats' union."

"We have to stick to their customs."

"I'd still like to tell the old dame off."

"This is Rome, George, not Chicago. You came here of your own free will."

"Where's Eleonora?" George asked.

"In the kitchen."

George went into the kitchen. Eleonora was washing the children's supper dishes in a pan of hot water. When George came in she looked up with fear, the fear in her left eye shining more brightly than in her right.

"I'm sorry about the business in the hall," George said with sympathy, "but why didn't you tell me about it this afternoon?"

"I don't want to make trouble."

"Would you like me to talk to the signora?"

"No, no."

"I want you to ride in the elevator if you want to."

"Thank you, but it doesn't matter."

"Then why are you crying?"

"I am always crying, Signore. Don't bother to notice it."

"Have it your own way," George said.

He thought that ended it, but a week later as he came into the building at lunch time he saw Eleonora getting into the elevator with a laundry bundle. The portinaia had just opened the door for her with her key, but when she saw George she quickly ducked down the stairs to the basement. George got on the elevator with Eleonora. Her face was crimson.

"I see you don't mind using the elevator," he said.

"Ah, Signore," she shrugged, "we must all try to improve ourselves."

"Are you no longer afraid of the signora?"

"Her girl told me the signora is sick," Eleonora said happily.

Eleonora's luck held, George learned, because the signora stayed too sick to be watching the elevator, and one day after the maid rode up in it to the roof, she met a plumber's helper working on the washtubs, Fabrizio Occhiogrosso, who asked her to go out with him on her next afternoon off. Eleonora, who had been doing little on her Thursday and Sunday afternoons off, mostly spending her time with the portinaia, readily accepted. Fabrizio, a short man with pointed shoes, a thick trunk, hairy arms, and the swarthy face of a Spaniard, came for her on his motorbike and away they would go together, she sitting on the seat behind him, holding both arms around his belly. She sat astride the seat, and when Fabrizio, after impatiently revving the Vespa, roared up the narrow street, the wind fluttered her skirt and her bare legs were exposed.

"Where do they go?" George once asked Grace.

"She says he has a room on the Via della Purificazione."

"Do they always go to his room?"

"She says they sometimes ride to the Borghese Gardens or go to the movies."

One night in early December, after the maid had mentioned that Fabrizio was her fiancé now, George and Grace stood at their living room window, looking down into the street as Eleonora got on the motorbike and it raced off out of sight.

"I hope she knows what she's doing," he muttered in a worried tone. "I don't much take to Fabrizio."

"So long as she doesn't get pregnant too soon. I'd hate to lose her."

George was silent for a time, then remarked, "How responsible do you suppose we are for her morals?"

"Her morals?" laughed Grace. "Are you batty?"

"I never had a maid before," George said.

"This is our third."

"I mean in principle."

"Stop mothering the world," said Grace.

Then one Sunday after midnight Eleonora came home on the verge of fainting. What George had thought might happen, had. Fabrizio had taken off into the night on his motor-bike. When they had arrived at his room early that evening, a girl from Perugia was sitting on his bed. The portiere had let her in after she had showed him an engagement ring and a snapshot of her and Fabrizio in a rowboat. When Eleonora demanded to know who this one was, the plumber's helper did not bother to explain but ran down the stairs, mounted his Vespa and drove away. The girl disappeared. Eleonora wandered the streets for hours, then returned to Fabrizio's room. The portiere told her that he had been back, packed his valise, and left for Perugia, the young lady riding on his back seat. Eleonora dragged herself home. When she got up the next morning to make breakfast she was a skeleton of herself and the *gobbo* looked like a hill. She said nothing and they asked nothing. What Grace wanted to know she later got from the portinaia. Eleonora no longer ran through her chores, but did everything wearily, each movement like flowing stone. Afraid she would collapse, George advised her to take a week off and go home. He would pay her salary and give her something extra for the bus.

"No, Signore," she said dully, "it is better for me to work." She said, "I have been through so much, more is not noticeable."

But then she had to notice it. One afternoon she absent-mindedly picked up Grace's keys and got on the elevator with

a bag of clothes to be washed. The signora, having recovered her health, was waiting for her. She flung open the door, grabbed Eleonora by the arm as she was about to close the elevator door, and dragged her out.

"Whore," she cried, "don't steal the privileges of your betters. Use the stairs."

Grace opened the apartment door to see what the shouting was about, and Eleonora, with a yowl, rushed past her. She locked herself in her room and sat there all afternoon without moving. She wept copiously. Grace, on the verge of exhaustion, could do nothing with her. When George came home from work that evening he tried to coax her out, but she shouted at him to leave her alone.

George was thoroughly fed up. "I've had enough," he said. He thought out how he would handle the signora, then told Grace he was going across the hall.

"Don't do it," she shouted, but he was already on his way.

George knocked on the signora's door. She was a woman of past sixty-five, a widow, always dressed in black. Her face was long and gray, but her eyes were bright black. Her husband had left her these two apartments across the hall from each other that he had owned outright. She lived in the smaller and rented the other, furnished, at a good rent. George knew that this was her only source of income. She had once been a schoolteacher.

"Scusi, Signora," said George, "I have come with a request."

"Prego." She asked him to sit.

George took a chair near the terrace window. "I would really appreciate it, Signora, if you will let our girl go into the elevator with the laundry when my wife sends her up to the tubs. She is not a fortunate person and we would like to make her life a little easier for her."

"I am sorry," answered the signora with dignity, "but I can't permit her to enter the elevator."

"She's a good girl and you have upset her very much."

"Good," said the signora, "I am glad. She must remember her place, even if you don't. This is Italy, not America. You

must understand that we have to live with these people long after you, who come to stay for a year or two, return to your own country."

"Signora, she does no harm in the elevator. We are not asking you to ride with her. After all, the elevators are a convenience for all who live in this house and therefore ought to be open for those who work for us here."

"No," said the signora.

"Why not think it over and let me know your answer tomorrow? I assure you I wouldn't ask this if I didn't think it was important."

"I have thought it over," she said stiffly, "and I have given you the same answer I will give tomorrow."

George got up. "In that case," he said, "if you won't listen to reason, I consider my lease with you ended. You have had your last month's rent. We will move on the first of February."

The signora looked as if she had just swallowed a fork.

"The lease is a sacred contract," she said, trembling. "It is against the law to break it."

"I consider that you have already broken it," George said quietly, "by creating conditions that make it very hard for my family to function in this apartment. I am simply acknowledging a situation that already exists."

"If you move out, I will take a lawyer and make you pay for the whole year."

"A lawyer will cost you half the rent he might collect," George answered. "And if my lawyer is better than yours you will get nothing and owe your lawyer besides."

"Oh, you Americans," said the signora bitterly. "How well I understand you. Your money is your dirty foot with which you kick the world. Who wants you here," she cried, "with your soaps and toothpastes and your dirty gangster movies!"

"I would like to remind you that my origin is Italian," George said.

"You have long ago forgotten your origin," she shouted.

George left the apartment and went back to his own.

"I'll bet you did it," Grace greeted him. Her face was ashen.

"I did," said George.

"I'll bet you fixed us good. Oh, you ought to be proud. How will we ever find another apartment in the dead of winter with two kids?"

She left George and locked herself in the children's bedroom. They were both awake and got out of bed to be with her.

George sat in the living room in the dark. I did it, he was thinking.

After a while the doorbell rang. He got up and put on the light. It was the signora and she looked unwell. She entered the living room at George's invitation and sat there with great dignity.

"I am sorry I raised my voice to a guest in my house," she said. Her mouth was loose and her eyes glistened.

"I am sorry I offended you," George said.

She did not speak for a while then said, "Let the girl use the elevator." The signora broke into tears.

When she had dried her eyes, she said, "You have no idea how sad things have become since the war. The girls are disrespectful. Their demands are endless, it is impossible to keep up with them. They talk back, they take every advantage. They crown themselves with privileges. It is a struggle to keep them in their place. After all, what have we left when we lose our self-respect?" The signora wept heartbrokenly.

After she had gone, George stood at the window. Across the street a beggar played a flute.

I didn't do it well, George thought. He felt depressed.

On her afternoon off Eleonora rode up and down on the elevator.

Two Poems by Molly Peacock

Waking Up

I try to keep the promises I make
—for each one broken breaks the world—and seem
inhuman: no crack, no fissure, no mistake.

Control of life is fear for fear's own sake.
A teacup soldered or a split of silk reseamed:
each makes me keep the promises I make.

To lower the pressure, I lower the stakes:
the weight of covenants can make me scream
my inhuman howls at my human mistakes—

like shrieking perfectionists in earthquakes.
I lower the stakes and whimper in my dreams
a prayer for a whole life (a promise kept) to make

sense. How childish I feel when I remake
childhood's dream: all things delivered in a stream
of consistency, no crack no fissure no mistake,

all done when planned. Swans arrive at their lake,
instincts awoken by angles of sunbeams—
surrender to nature's perfection means

to know one's nature, no mistake. Sometimes I sense
a life asleep beneath my frenzy, and I wake
from a promise of youth that I no longer make.

Why I Am Not a Buddhist

I love desire, the state of want and thought
of how to get; building a kingdom in a soul
requires desire. I love the things I've sought—
you in your beltless bathrobe, tongues of cash that loll
from my billfold—and love what I want: clothes,
houses, redemption. Can a new mauve suit
equal God? Oh no, desire is ranked. To lose
a loved pen is not like losing faith. Acute
desire for nut gateau is driven out by death,
but the cake on its plate has meaning,
even when love is endangered and nothing matters.
For my mother, health; for my sister, bereft,
wholeness. But why is desire suffering?
Because want leaves a world in tatters?
How else but in tatters should a world be?
A columned porch set high above a lake.
Here, take my money. A loved face in agony,
the spirit gone. Here, use my rags of love.

Karen Fish

The Dreams

Night arrives solid and heavy
more than several blocks long—to displace
its weight and float like a tanker over us.
It is because my husband is from the midwest
that he dreams of twisters. Every Spring
in his head he is running to beat the wind.
Sometimes, a child again
he is at the diningroom table over-seeing
an arrangement of baseball cards and
interrupting that satisfied moment, a sudden darkness,
false night. It is as if the moon slid its face
in front of the sun and beyond the window—leaves,
limbs, garbage can lids fly by—horizontal, gravity
seeming to nap.
He hears his dead father's cough from the front room,
his father's slippers hit the floor and rush for the screen door.
A garage three-doors-down is lifted,
picked up and turned ninety degrees and placed
back down on its own foundation.
This is power—indiscriminate, unexpected—slicing
the afternoon in half.
Other nights, he finds himself an adult,
memory so accurate that it is surreal,
his first wife's walk, his mother's blouse,
his nephew's first dirty word.
He is always racing against the odds—trying to
run fast through knee deep water,
hide in a cellar,
close a blown window,
latch a gate,
the funnel-cloud eating a path toward him.

The other night, I had a dream and being from the East
 I have never thought about what a tornado could undo—
 the sky turned green along a cliff of clouds.

Green like the queer pea-soup haze painted-in behind
 Moses in the childhood Bible.

My husband and I were in the country, under this high sky.
 And in this dream we were living in the farmhouse.

He was with me in my former life.

The winter wheat shimmered, grasped the draining light
 and turned to water.

In the distance the funnel unhitches from its backdrop of hills
 and we watch it skate across the fields of the Amish.

We are stopped on the dirt road, frozen as everything
 around us unlatches and shakes—convulses in the wind.

Suddenly, the color fades from the scene,

 this is black-and-white

like any good science fiction show.

Trees fall to their knees, huge broccoli tops.

There is the strange lane of destruction, the flattened
 chicken coop, the neighbor's mobile home shredded
 lettuce on the lawn.

We are untouched, the barn proud.

And here, I see the world for what it is—

see the scene my lover sees and fears—the world undressed
 of illusion, frail, the line of destruction crazy, a zig-zag path.

One side havoc and on the other side, nothing
 but the unbraided cornfield.

The numerals of darkness fade between the houses.

And just as the lover is supposed to mirror

the loved and vice versa—just as my past *is* his

this is the ultimate primitive ceremony, beyond the
 exchanging of rings—taking on the other's fears

and living them as your own nightmare

under the vaulted sky,

the sun advancing to declare the day.

George Bradley

The 4th of July, and

The sidewalks are wobbling in the god-awful heat,
Ninety-eight in the shade,
Where there is shade, as New York lies locked under
Layers of high pressure
That trap the thick atmosphere (ozone, exhaust, smog
Drifted over from Jersey,
Infernal dampness: "It's not the heat, it's the whatchamacallit,"
Said a fat girl in the elevator,
Too hot or too humid to get a grip on her clichés,
Clapping it over your face:
Today, Independence Day, on the verge of moving to the burbs
(7 rms, 2 bths, occ. negotiable),
I walk to the window (how the black dust seeps in!) and look
Upon the city I am losing;
Lines for everything, jack-hammers, crime, garbage,
Rent out the whazoo,
Air pollution, noise pollution, rush-hour traffic, dope,
Payola, beautiful people,
Bag people, a new disease every day, cyclical poverty,
Mayor Koch (yech),
Donald Trump (yech, yech), Leona Helmsley (STOP!):
Why even Sandy McClatchy,
Who, let's face it, is a man at pains to appear urbane,
When he got back last time
Said this town seems more and more like Calcutta,
So why, can you tell me,
After ten years of such dreck should I be sorry to go?
I mean, should I care?
Because, excuse me, fresh bagels all by themselves
Can't make up for it all,

Not even from H & H World's Best Bagels, where the sign says
 "You'll Be in Heaven—Share Them!!!"
 (O.k.: oh to be standing in the March A.M. with a hot bagel
 In your hand, its soft flesh
 Yielding to your fingers and the steam rising into your face . . .
 Mmmm, make mine with raisins).
 But today, Independence Day, as a huge, hazy, orange sun
 Sets over the Bayonne swamps
 Like an industrial disaster, like gas flaring over an oil field,
 Why give a second thought,
 Can you tell me please, to the notion of kissing goodbye
 Cabbies who know everything
 And got off the boat just last week? of leaving behind
 Cops with that big-city attitude
 And that high school education? of bidding a final *adieu*
 To the Eurotrash crowding midtown?
 Why is the heart downcast to think I won't be seeing
 The promenade along the Heights
 (Alright, I don't go there all that often, but I *could*),
 Where I chatted with Ben Gardner
 The third time he got off the ward? We availed ourselves
 Of that view and spoke of how,
 Statistically considered, the odds were his mind would now
 Never really be right again.
 And what of the old-world roses in back of the Brooklyn
 Museum?
 If you time your visit right
 (The 4th of July is too late, early in June would be better),
 You can take in Albert Bierstadt
 And then find Coral Creeper in bloom, pale apricot and
 smelling
 Sweeter even than oil paint.
 Or if that seems too out-of-town (those Japanese tour groups
 Just *love* botanical gardens),
 We speeding bedlamites might cross the bridge and drop
 By Chumley's for a drink:
 Left over from prohibition, Chumley's is all a bar should be,
 Dark and cool, even in July,

And decorated with book jackets by authors famous in their time.

Let's have gin gimlets
(Just gin and lime juice, no additives—New York bartenders
Will try to be original)

And look around the place, at the wood paneling and stone hearth

And two inconspicuous exits,
Still a handy feature if you see someone you'd rather not.

Now that we've started
Who wants to stop? Let's do them all, let's hit the White Horse
Where Hudson St. begins
(Only, please, this once, could we get in and out without
quoting

His Welsh and blottoed self?);
Let's taxi up Park Ave. to the lounge at the Mayfair Regent
And sit in wing-back chairs

While the girls in Victorian garb bring us exotic rum punches;
Let's take the tube to Tribeca,
To Puffy's on Varick St. (yes, I know Puffy's is all yuppies
now—

Too close to the exchanges,
And besides, artists can't afford Tribeca anymore—but today
Everyone's left for the 4th
And we can drink in peace as the trucks coming out of the
tunnel

Rumble past warehouses outside).
Look, let's really celebrate—come on, I'm leaving this town—
I know an opium den

Not far from the Manhattan Bridge (that engineering
embarrassment,

That rickety hodgepodge,
That architectural macaronic of gothic arches and filigree
finials

And some sort of Brandenburg Gate
Providing triumphal entry to the stoplights along Flatbush
Ave.),

And if we beg at the door

We might just get in, even though we don't speak Chinese
And have big noses and smell bad.

What do you mean you don't want to? What else is New York
for?

Costly hangovers and cheap ennui,
So come on, and since we're half-drunk and headed that
direction,

Let's stop at Diamond Lil's,
The joint on Canal where Rick Tilton used to get flat polluted
As he drank and drew the dancers
(All the models a painter could ask for, right there on the bar,
And striking *most* unusual poses),
Only—damn!—I forgot, Diamond Lil's became McDonald's,
and that

Is the trouble with this town:
Just when you get used to it, get to know your way around,
The city you have learned is gone,
Torn down and made over according to someone else's
blueprint

Of how New York should be,
The landscape of your desires replaced by one more up-
to-date,

By something more profitable
(Building New York making politicians so much money they
elect

To repeat the effect regularly),
So that if you go looking for McFeely's, in the Terminal Hotel
At the west end of 23rd,
Where Dan Halpern and Stephen Spender came in to eat one
night

With a copy of Schuyler's poem
Called "Dining Out with Doug and Frank," which takes place
there,

And started reading it aloud
Without even noticing—dumb bunnies—that sitting right
next to them

Were Doug and Frank in the flesh,

You'll find it's closed, kaput, in renovation, i.e. done for;
 And if you go looking
 At the head of Macdougall for the Eighth St. Bookstore,
 Where my poems will never stand
 Between Byron and Blake (and right next to Charles Bukowski:
 Sometimes life is pure bathos),
 You'll find it's disappeared, vanished like volumes out-of-
 print,
 Literally gone up in smoke,
 And if New York has its bookstores still, still none of them,
 Not Gotham Bookmart
 (It's clubby and confuses literature with rock 'n' roll, but has
 Plenty of poetry anyway),
 Not Books & Co. (spruce, with a so-so poetry selection
 unaccountably
 Interspersed with prose),
 Not the Phoenix, Gryphon, St. Marks, not Coliseum, not the
 Strand,
 No none of them approach
 That paragon, that platonic ideal, the paradise of bibliophiles,
 Eighth St. Bookstore of my mind!
 And that, of course, is the landfill it's all been dragged to,
 The suburb it's all moved into,
 The city of my recollection become the province of idle
 thought,
 Its buildings suddenly transported,
 Transformed into an imagined land, a half-visible locale
 Where Kim Rogal and David Kalstone
 (Each genial, myopic, bemused) may still be found at parties;
 Where some celluloid *obscurité*
 Still shows nightly to the faithful lined up outside the Thalia
 (Inside are popcorn-eating mice
 And the feeling of being between decks on a tramp steamer);
 Where those old synagogues
 On the lower east side, with their snakey, oriental motifs,
 And those upper west side churches,
 With their quasi-military towers and turrets, all still stand
 (Churches are like women for me . . .

Worship seems a bit excessive, but I do like to look at them),
 And the trashy condos
 That replaced them are stripped, gutted, dynamited, razed;
 Where the Day Line still plies
 Hudson's River, pushing upstream all the way to Poughkeepsie
 To return among green prospects
 Past Storm King and the Tappan Zee, past the Palisades
 (That beetling escarpment
 In which geologic time is evident as writing on the wall),
 Back to New York, Sin City,
 Wick to the wicked and home to eight million aspirations:
 City of unnatural light,
 City of squalor and big ambition, O infinitely human city,
 Your every aspect I have
 At heart from this day Fourth as the secret that defines me,
 A Central Park of the soul,
 Composed of all the beauty and violence that is the past,
 A darkening confine from which
 Patterns of memory will rise like poems, like the explosions
 That have now begun to burst
 Above the Park, above the Battery (when I lived in Brooklyn,
 In a factory in the ghetto,
 Holidays would bring fireworks over Manhattan and brisk
 reports
 Of gunfire throughout Fort Green),
 In radiant showers of red and white and blue, a first-class
 farewell,
 A really super send-off,
 The simply dazzling evanescence ("one lollapalooza of a
 show!"
 "Rip-snorting entertainment!"
 "Mesmerizing, jaw-gritting excitement!") that is what I take
 away
 On July 4th 1988, Independence Day.



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The Art of Fiction CXI William Kennedy

January 1983, the month of his fifty-sixth birthday, heralded the beginning of a marvelous era of fame and fortune in the life of William Kennedy. Ironweed, Kennedy's fourth novel, was published to widespread critical acclaim, and that same month the MacArthur Foundation awarded him a six-figure tax-free grant to use as he pleased. Two of his previous novels, Legs (1975) and Billy Phelan's Greatest Game (1978), were reissued in paperback, and later in 1983 Kennedy began a collaboration with Francis Ford Coppola on The Cotton Club screenplay.

Using part of his MacArthur grant, Kennedy established the Albany Writers Institute, which would bring internationally-known writers such as William Styron, Seamus Heaney, John Updike, and Toni Morrison to Kennedy's hometown for lectures and workshops. In December 1983 Kennedy published O Albany!, a book of lyric essays celebrating the real life of the city he had recreated as a mythic entity in his novels.

William Kennedy was on a Midas-like literary roll. In 1984 he won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics' Circle Award for Ironweed; and his first novel, The Ink Truck (1969), was reissued in both hardcover and paperback. Mario Cuomo declared that Albany had "found its Homer" in Kennedy, and he added the New York Governor's Arts Award to Kennedy's collection of honors. Kennedy sold the film rights to three novels, and signed contracts to write the screenplays (Ironweed became a film in 1987). Later in 1984 the New York legislature renamed the Albany Writers Institute the New York State Writers Institute and provided a \$100,000 grant for it. In 1988 Kennedy published his most recent novel, Quinn's Book. Kennedy's novels had put Albany on the map, and he was becoming a highly-visible public man of letters.

The first interview session took place in July 1984 as Kennedy was finishing a magazine piece about working on the screenplay for The Cotton Club. Kennedy talked for most of a Saturday afternoon at his home outside of Averill Park, a small community east of Albany and the Hudson River in a region of rolling hills where the landscape is sprinkled with picturesque lakes, meadows, and woods. A second interview was conducted in Spring 1988.

The Kennedys live in a handsome nineteenth-century farmhouse, a large white clapboard house with green trim and shutters, shaded and decorated on three sides by mature blue spruce, Norway spruce, and sugar maple trees. At the back of the house is a wooden deck, and across an expanse of lawn a swimming pool that was a sparkling invitation in the hot July sun on the day of the first interview session.

Kennedy, tall and fit, looking younger than his fifty-seven years, in spite of the fact that his Irish red hair showed signs

of thinning on top, appeared at the front door wearing a red-and-white striped sport shirt with rolled-up sleeves, white cotton pants, and white dress shoes. Born and bred in the city, a well-traveled, cosmopolitan man, he gave the clear impression of being very much at home in the country.

After a short excursion outside in the midday heat, Kennedy suggested that we go to his air-conditioned writing studio, a spacious corner room on the second floor.

Shelves of nonfiction works lined one side of the upstairs hallway, and his studio was filled from floor to ceiling with books against three of the walls: fiction, poetry, plays, and one large section of books on films and film criticism. A large wooden desk took up most of the space between two windows that looked out on the spruce and maple trees in the yard. Bookcases at each end of the desk were filled with reference books. The top of a cedar chest on the green shag rug was covered by more piles of books and papers, and nearby were boxes of letters Kennedy had received from his readers.

Collages of memorabilia decorated the back of the door to the hallway and the wall behind the desk: a poster of Francis Phelan from the cover of Ironweed; announcements of public readings Kennedy had given; a poster announcement of a reading by Saul Bellow at the Writers Institute; award plaques, and an honorary doctorate of letters; and photographs from Kennedy's days as a newsman.

A straw hat with a black band hung from one of the curtain rods. It belonged to William Kennedy Sr., who wore it in the 1920s. Another link to family and the past was Kennedy's typewriter, set on a sturdy wooden leaf pulled out from the desk—a black L.C. Smith & Corona, 1934 vintage, that belonged to his mother, Mary Kennedy. Although he now has a word processor for revisions, Kennedy still composes on this machine.

Kennedy sat at his desk in a wooden swivel chair that creaked slightly when he leaned back. Choosing his words with precision, he was often pensive with a serious, faraway look in his eyes as he talked of his life and his work.

INTERVIEWER

Can you explain the circumstances under which you got the MacArthur Award?

WILLIAM KENNEDY

Well, in January I got a call from a man named Dr. Hope, and he asked me, was I William Kennedy, the writer, and I said I was. He said, Congratulations, you have just been awarded a MacArthur Fellowship, which will give you \$264,000 tax-free over the next five years. I'd gotten a Chinese fortune cookie that week which said, this is your lucky week. I thought it had to do with the fact that I was getting reviewed in about five different major places in the same week. I thought that was good enough, but then I got the MacArthur. Quite a week!

INTERVIEWER

Is there any particular achievement to which they give recognition?

KENNEDY

They give it to you with no strings attached; they give it to all sorts of people—scientists, historians, translators, poets. Their first award to a writer that got widespread recognition was given to Robert Penn Warren. They give it to you on the basis of what you've done, but more important, I think, is their belief that you are going to do a lot more. It's an award given with faith that the person is going to be productive. You don't have to do anything for it; it just all of a sudden comes at you, like a health plan to cradle and protect you.

INTERVIEWER

Has the award changed your life?

KENNEDY

The change is that I have more options now to do things that have nothing to do with writing. Everybody wants me to become a fundraiser or a public speaker or a teacher or go back

to journalism or sit still and be interviewed. I've also become a correspondent. I've got something like a thousand letters, and the only thing I can do is try to answer some of them. Some I'll never get to, but I keep trying. All this is very time-consuming. The fact is that it's also very pleasant. I'm solvent, I can travel, I've been able to rewire the house, dig a new well, install a new furnace, put in a pool. Somebody accused me of going Hollywood in Averill Park, but that's not accurate. I wanted a pool for twenty years. If I have a pool I'll swim in it. If I don't have a pool I won't swim. And I don't exercise, I don't do anything . . . I never walk. I tend to dance at parties, which is a good way of having a heart attack if your feet still think you're a nineteen-year-old jitterbug. The change has been very pleasant. People ask will I change the way I write, and I don't believe I will. The work is based on what I see in the world, what's around me and what I take home from that. It's a superficial response if you change your writing because of a temporary change in your personal condition.

INTERVIEWER

Success came to you very late. *Ironweed* was turned down by thirteen publishing houses. How could a book which won the Pulitzer Prize be turned down by so many publishers?

KENNEDY

Yes. Thirteen rejections. Remember that character in "Li'l Abner," Joe Btfsplk, who went around with a cloud over his head? Well, I was the Joe Btfsplk of modern literature for about two years. What happened was that I sold this book, then my editor left publishing; so that threw the ball game into extra innings. They gave me an editor in Georgia and I said, "I don't want an editor in Georgia; I want an editor in New York." They didn't like that. She was a very good editor, but she only came to New York every two months. Georgia is even more remote from the center of literary activity than Albany. She was living on a pecan farm, as I recall. So that got the publisher's nose out of joint. My agent was not very polite with them and finally we separated. In the meantime, my first

editor came back to publishing and, finding that Joe Btfsplk cloud hanging over my head, was not terribly enthusiastic about taking me back. So I went over to Henry Robbins whom I had met at a cocktail party. Henry at that point was a very hot New York editor. He had just gone over to Dutton. Everybody was flocking to him. He was John Irving's editor. Joyce Carol Oates moved over there. Doris Grumbach moved in; so did John Gregory Dunne. It looked like Dutton was about to become the Scribner's of the new age. So anyway, at the cocktail party he said, "Can I see your book?" And I said, "Of course." I sent it to him and he wrote me back this wonderful letter saying that he loved the idea of adding me to their list. I picked up the paper a week later and he had just dropped dead in the subway on his way to work. So I then went over to another publisher where a former editor of mine had been; she was somewhat enthusiastic, thought we might be able to make it if there were some changes in the book. And then she was let go. I bounced about nine more times. Then fate intervened in the form of an assignment from *Esquire* to do an interview with Saul Bellow, who had been a teacher of mine for a semester, in San Juan. He had really encouraged me at a very early age to become a writer. So he took it upon himself—I didn't urge him, and I was very grateful to him for doing it—to write my former editor at Viking, saying that he didn't think it was proper for his former publisher to let a writer like Kennedy go begging. Two days later I got a call from Viking saying that they wanted to publish *Ironweed* and what did I think of the possibility of publishing *Legs* and *Billy Phelan* again at the same time.

INTERVIEWER

It would seem that Bellow was the answer.

KENNEDY

I think he's probably had several manuscripts sent to him since then. As have I.

INTERVIEWER

During this there must have been an immense amount of

frustration. Did that experience give you ideas for changes that can or should be made in the publishing industry to encourage the writing of first-rate serious fiction?

KENNEDY

I don't know what to do to change the world that way, except to generate a running sense of shame in their attitudes toward their own behavior so that the next time they might pay more serious attention to the work at hand. So much of the publishing world is run on the basis of *marketplace* success, and so when a book is rejected as a financial loser, it immediately has a cloud over it, especially if the writer is already established with one publishing house and this house chooses not to take his next novel. That carries a stigma; you're like a leper. You go from house to house, and they say, well, why didn't so-and-so publish it? They published your last book. So you live under that cloud until you find some editor who understands the book and is willing to take a chance on it. I don't know how to change human nature about this. I'm very pessimistic about it. I just see one good writer after another in deep trouble.

INTERVIEWER

So the difficulty in getting books like *Ironweed* published is not necessarily due to the lack of good editors at the major publishing houses, but might be more closely tied to the prevailing corporate policy you're speaking of?

KENNEDY

I think that there's a casualness about the way things are read. I think subject matter tends to play a large part. If you have a novel of intrigue or romance, with adultery or exotic locale, or a spy thriller, you probably won't have too much trouble getting published. If you have a major reputation, you're not going to have any problem getting published. But it's the writers who fall in the middle, who write serious books about subjects that are not the stuff of mass marketing, they have the problem—the so-called “mid-list” phenomenon. If the publishers don't think it's going to sell past a certain amount of copies, then they're not interested. And I would

think that that was the case with *Ironweed*. People had decided it was a depressing book, set in the Depression, about a bum, a loser, a very downbeat subject. Who wants to read a book about bums? So they chose not to accept it. Yet it's not a downbeat book. It's a book about family, about redemption and perseverance, it's a book about love, faded violence, and any number of things. It's about the Irish, it's about the church.

So, again, I don't see how you're going to change the way editors think. They can't contravene the commercial element in their publishing house. They're as good as the books they bring in, and if those books don't make money, what good are the editors? Very sad.

INTERVIEWER

All these years of being turned down with books and short stories . . . I understand even *The Paris Review* turned down one story.

KENNEDY

That's true. You did give me a nice rejection slip, although I must say it wasn't as nice as the one I got from *The Atlantic*. That one said, "You write with a facility that has held our attention." But my story had their coffee drippings on it, even so.

INTERVIEWER

You started as a journalist in Albany. What was your favorite aspect of journalism? Why did it appeal to you?

KENNEDY

It was the uncertainty of general assignment that was terrific: the police stories, the disaster stories, the politics, the squirrely interviews with some guy who had just walked across the country from Montana wearing a taillight and the dopester who had a perfect system to beat the horses and wanted the world to know about it, but he was broke because he was unlucky. That sort of thing was fun, but Albany, I thought, was moribund. I had exhausted the city in a certain way—at that age—and so along came the possibility to go down to the trop-

ics and work in San Juan. That seemed very exotic. I applied and got the job. I went down in April 1956 and started to work on a newspaper called *The Puerto Rico World Journal*. It had existed during the war years as a publication for soldiers and sailors who were stationed in Puerto Rico and for the American civilian component. It was a stepchild of the major Spanish language daily, *El Mundo*. It only lasted nine months, but it was a valuable experience. I love Puerto Rico. I had a great time socially, as a columnist, and I wound up being assistant managing editor when the city editor went to lunch one day and never came back. When the newspaper died, I got married. I met Dana just when the paper was on its last legs. Then I went over for an interview at *The Miami Herald* and got a job writing about Cuban exiles, Castro in the hills, the C.I.A., revolutionaries, political thieves. It was great stuff.

INTERVIEWER

What, other than journalism, were you writing at the time?

KENNEDY

Having failed miserably as a short-story writer, I decided it was time to go out and fail as a novelist. I started in Miami, and I realized that I couldn't do it full-time — the job was very time-consuming. I was writing good things for the paper, but I was bored, really. Some of the stories I was writing were not unlike what I had done at the *Times-Union* — a story on a cop giving a ticket to a little kid in a kiddie car, an escaped jaguar attacking a tomato plant in a woman's back yard. I stayed with the coverage for seven months and then decided that it was as deadly as everything else I was doing and I really had to get out. So I quit, went back to Puerto Rico and wrote a rotten novel. It went around to an agent or two and nobody liked it. So I put it on the shelf and it hasn't seen the daylight since.

INTERVIEWER

What influence did Saul Bellow have on you?

KENNEDY

I met Saul in Puerto Rico when he was teaching at the

university at Rio Piedras. I was managing editor of another brand new daily paper, the *San Juan Star*, but was writing yet another novel before and after work. I sent it to Bellow and he accepted me in his class. It was an important development and I took his criticism very seriously. He would explain that my writing was “fatty”— I was saying everything twice and I had too many adjectives. He said it was also occasionally “clotty”—it was imprecision he was talking about, an effort to use a word that wasn’t quite precise and so screwed up the clause or sentence. When he pointed that out to me, I would go back through the whole book and slash—it turned me into a real fiction editor of my own copy, and it later helped when I became a teacher. If I was ruthless with my own stuff, why shouldn’t be I with everybody else’s? Bellow also talked about being prodigal. He said that a writer shouldn’t be parsimonious with his work, but “prodigal, like nature.” He said just think of nature and how many billions of sperm are used when only one is needed for creating life. And that principle was, it seemed, at the heart of *Augie March*, a novel that exploded with language and ideas. I never became that kind of writer, but I think the effusion, the principle was important. I was never afraid of writing too much, never thought that just because you’ve written a sentence it means something, or that it’s a good sentence just because you’ve written it. You know, I wrote *Legs* eight times, and it was taller than my son when both he and the manuscript were six years old. I have a picture of them together. One day Bellow was reading this section of a story where I had gone back and rewritten the things he had suggested I change. He looked up at me, and he said, “Hey, this is publishable!” Nobody had ever said that about anything I had written before, so I went out and bought a bottle of champagne and went back and had a party with my wife and some friends. Having come that distance—twelve years of writing in the dark—then having somebody of value suddenly say that, well it put me onto a different level of existence as a writer. It verified the apprenticeship, moved me into journeyman status. And I kept writing.

INTERVIEWER

Because of your isolation and all the rejections, did you ever think: This is not my profession. I should really be doing something else.

KENNEDY

No, I never thought that. As I used to say on Thursday afternoons—when I was on my day off from the *Albany Times-Union* and waiting for the muse to descend and discovering that it was the muse's day off too—you have to beat the bastards. I didn't even know who the bastards were, but you have to beat somebody. You have to beat your own problematic imagination to discover what it is you're saying and how to say it and move forward into the unknown. I always knew that (a) I wanted to be a writer and (b) if you persist in doing something, that sooner or later you will achieve it. It's just a matter of persistence—and a certain amount of talent. You can't do anything without talent, but you can't do anything without persistence either. Bellow and I once talked about that. We were talking in general about writing and publishing and so on, and he said there's a certain amount of talent that's necessary. All sorts of people are out there with no talent trying very hard and nothing comes of it. You must have some kind of talent. But after that, it's character. I said, "What do you mean by character?" And he smiled at me, and never said anything. So I was left for the rest of my life to define what he meant that night. What I concluded was that character is equivalent to persistence. That if you just refuse to give up, the game's not over. You know, I had had enormous success in everything I'd done in life, up until the time I decided to be a writer. I was a good student; I was a good soldier. I got a hole-in-one one day on the golf course. I bowled 299, just like Billy Phelan. I was a very good newspaperman. Anything I wanted to do in journalism, it seemed to work; it just fell into place. So I didn't understand why I was so successful as a journalist and zilch as a novelist and short-story writer. It was just that time was working against me. You just have to learn. It's such a complicated

craft . . . such a complicated thing to understand what you're trying to bring out of your own imagination, your own life.

INTERVIEWER

Did you find yourself getting better and better at it?

KENNEDY

Well, I thought I was terrific when I wrote *The Ink Truck* and they published it—Jesus! But then I wrote *Legs* and everybody kept saying, “This is not good.” People would turn it down; my own editor, who wanted to publish it, kept saying, “This is not working.” I couldn’t figure it out. It was six years of figuring and discovering. *Legs* was the novel where I really learned how to write a novel. And it takes you a long time to discover that, to probe whatever it is that you have in you. Where is your talent, where is your voice, where is your style? It was a complicated and sometimes painful struggle. To have an editor say to you, “We think you should turn this into a *biography* of Legs Diamond”—well, I immediately left that bind and went off on my own. And that was the night I sat down and decided to write *Legs* one more time, and that was the one that worked.

INTERVIEWER

What was the solution?

KENNEDY

I had been trying to do the book in a multiplicity of ways. I began thinking I would write it as a film-in-process, because the gangster had been such a charismatic presence in movies; I wanted to make a literary artifact in which the film would be a significant element. That became a silly gimmick. I tried to make it a surrealistic novel. I tried to pattern it totally on the Tibetan Book of the Dead; those chapters are pretty wild. The process of elimination left me with the Henry Jamesian wisdom that I really needed a point of view on this. I tried to write it from inside Diamond and it didn’t work and I tried to write from outside Diamond with a chorus of voices and it

didn't work. And then I discovered that if I used the lawyer who was in the book from the beginning as this intelligent presence who could look at Diamond and intersect with him at every level of his life, then I would be able to have a perspective on what was going on inside the man. So I did that and it made all the difference. It also made a difference that I spent three months just talking to myself, trying to figure out every character and defining the plot from scratch, narrowing it down. I had five years' worth of paper at that time but that three months' worth of work made all the difference. Then the book began to define itself. That's when you really understand craft.

INTERVIEWER

It is a technical problem.

KENNEDY

Absolutely. That's what I was up against. I had so much research, so much knowledge about this man, so many possible directions I could go in. I had done a massive amount of research because I wanted to discover what his life was really like. It turned out to be very complicated. He had been a celebrity quite apart from anything I had imagined of any gangster. I knew about the notoriety of Al Capone and I had heard of Legs Diamond, but it wasn't until I really began to go after him that I saw how much he had occupied the front pages of the newspapers of the country and the world. He was notorious, front-page stories about him every day, for weeks at a time. As a fugitive crossing the Atlantic on an ocean liner he was the cynosure of international news coverage. I knew he was a son of a bitch but even a life like his is worthy of attention in fiction. If you fix seriously on the transition from one life form to another, from defensible street life to the indefensible, where somebody begins to be a willfully cruel human being, that's worth doing. I wanted to understand the man but also the age, and I did not want to offer up another novel that would be historically inaccurate. So many books and films about Diamond and his kind were travesties. And so I got

hooked on research, couldn't get out from under the library's microfilm machine until I finally realized I was doing myself a great disservice; because your imagination can't absorb all that new material and synthesize it easily. If you're trying to transform the material, which is what fiction must do or else it remains journalism, or biography, then you have to let your imagination have a little rest. So I quit. I could have done another six months of research on Diamond, but I gave up. That's when I sat down, slowly absorbed all that I'd collected, and invented Diamond—a brand new Legs Diamond—from scratch. Authentic but new.

INTERVIEWER

Would he recognize himself?

KENNEDY

Oh yes, he already has. After I finished the book and it was about to be published, my wife had a dream: Legs Diamond came up to our front door and knocked on the door. Then he got down on the lawn, laid back and rolled around and kicked his legs in the air. He said to Dana, "Bill got it just right."

INTERVIEWER

What a relief! Do you get letters from people who are historians of the twenties who say, "No, no, you didn't get that right?"

KENNEDY

Every once in a while, somebody writes me and says I didn't get the death of Legs Diamond right, but I never defined who killed him. That's still a mystery.

INTERVIEWER

How important is a sense of place in your fiction? How did Puerto Rico and Albany affect your fiction?

KENNEDY

The Puerto Rico short stories I wrote seemed to have no

resonance, I suppose because I lacked a full historical sense of the place. They represented what Eudora Welty once called "the Isle of Capri novel," the transient story that could be set in Paris or Honolulu, all events taking place in a villa or a resort. The shallowness is evident; soap opera, really. I was leaving out the density of life in a given place and I came to know it. I kept reading Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* over and over, trying to understand how he'd done it. It was extraordinary to see how he knew so much about a group of people and at the same time reflected an entire cosmos, and with such remarkable language and invention. I wanted to understand any place I wrote about in the same way; and I believe that book more than any other led me to the sense of place in a novel. I started to write about Albany when I was still in San Juan and I realized how little I knew even of my own home town. When I came back to Albany to live I immersed myself in its history and I still can't get enough of the place. Some people have said that *Ironweed* could have been set anywhere because it has a universality about it; and that's nice to hear. But it couldn't have taken place in Capri, or Honolulu; not every town has a skid row and a mission, or trolley strikes with the heavy violence that made Francis Phelan what he was. Even being Irish Catholic—it's not the same even in Ireland as it is in Albany.

INTERVIEWER

How would you assess your development as a stylist?

KENNEDY

Somewhere back in the late sixties a friend of mine named Gene McGarr—we were sitting in The Lion's Head in Greenwich Village one afternoon—said to me, "You know, Irishmen are people who sit around trying to say things good." That is the purest expression of style I've ever come across. I remember being enormously impressed by Damon Runyon's style when I was a kid because it was so unique. It just leaped out at you and said, "Look at me! I'm a style!" And Hemingway had a style. These people were egregiously stylish. Then I read Gra-

ham Greene and I couldn't find a style. I thought, why doesn't this man have a style? I liked his stories enormously, and his novels, but what was his style? Of course he has an extraordinary style in telling a story, great economy and intelligence. Obviously these were adolescent attitudes toward style, valuing ways of being singular. I admired journalists who had style, Red Smith and Mencken. You wouldn't mistake their writing, you'd know it right away. What I set out to do very early on, in college, was to mold a style; and then I realized it was an artificial effort. I was either imitating Red Smith or Hemingway, or Runyon, or whomever, and I gave up on it. I realized that was death. Every time I'd reread it, I'd say that's not you, that's somebody else. As I went on in journalism I was always trying to say something in a way that was neither clichéd nor banal, that was funny if possible, or dramatic if possible. I began to expand my language: sentences grew more complicated, the words became more arcane. I used the word "eclectic" once in a news story and it came out "electric." It was a willful strain at being artsy, so I gave that up too. And as soon as I gave up, I wrote the only thing that I could write, which was whatever came to my head in the most natural possible way. And I evolved into whatever it is I've become. If I have a style, I don't know how to evaluate it. I wouldn't know what to say about my style. I think *The Ink Truck* is an ambitious book in language. I think certain parts of *Legs* are also; but Marcus is still telling that story in a fairly offhanded way, using the vernacular in large measure. *Billy Phelan* goes from being inside Martin Daugherty's mind, which is a far more educated mind, to Billy Phelan's, and the narration is really only in service of representing those two minds. This was very different from what I came to in *Ironweed*, where I set out at the beginning to use the best language at my disposal. I thought my third person voice was me at first, but the more I wrote, the more I realized that the third person voice was this ineffable level of Francis Phelan's life, a level he would never get to consciously, but which was there somehow. And that became the style of the telling of the story; and the language became as good as I could make it whenever I felt it was time

for those flights of rhetoric up from the sidewalk, out of the gutter. Francis moves in and out of those flights sometimes in the same sentence. A word will change the whole attitude toward what he's thinking, or talking about, or just intuiting silently. I think that as soon as you abandon your overt efforts at style, that's where you begin to find your own voice. Then it becomes a matter of editing out what doesn't belong—a subordinate clause that says, "That's Kafka," or "That's Melville," whoever it might be. If you don't get rid of that, every time you reread that sentence you think: petty larceny.

INTERVIEWER

The first chapter of *Ironweed* sets the tone for the rest of the book by showing us Francis Phelan through the eyes of the dead, and through his own encounters in memory with the ghosts from his past, with many shifts back and forth in time. The first chapter has a literary magic about it that persists throughout the book and makes the book work in a unique way—but I wonder if you encountered any editorial resistance to the narrative technique when you took *Ironweed* to publishers.

KENNEDY

Considerable. There was one editor who said it was not credible to write this kind of a story and put those kinds of thoughts into Francis Phelan's mind, because no bum thinks that way. That's so abjectly ignorant of human behavior that it really needs no comment except that that man should not be allowed anywhere near a manuscript. Congress should enact a law prohibiting that man from being an editor. I also sent the first few chapters to *The New Yorker* and an editor over there said it was a conventional story about an Irish drunk and they'd had enough of that sort of thing in the past, and they wished me well and thought it was quite well done, and so on. That seemed very wrong-headed. It's hardly a conventional story about an Irish drunk when he's talking to the dead, when he's on an odyssey of such dimensions as Francis is on. I'd never read a book like it, and it seems to me that that's a comment

I hear again and again. But again, you have to put up with editors who don't know what they're reading. One editor said there were too many bums in the book and I should get rid of some. And a friend of mine said, "I understand, I love this chapter, but there's an awful lot of negative things in it, there's vomit and a lot of death and violence and there's a lot of sadness, you know, and it's such a downbeat chapter that editors won't want to buy it. Maybe you should alter it to get the editors past the first chapter." Well, there was no way I could take his advice; I had written the book, and it was either going to stand or fall on what it was. I also felt that there was no real merit in the advice, although it was an astute observation about the way some editors are incapable of judging serious literature seriously. There were also people who just said, "I don't like it." Somebody said, "I could never sell it." Somebody else said, "It's a wonderful book, nobody's ever written anything better about this subject than you have, but I can't add another book to my list that won't make any money." These were more mundane, these were money considerations, but I think those other, more pretentious rejections had the same basis; they just didn't believe a book about bums was ever going to make it in the marketplace, but they didn't dare say so out loud. It's not a book about bums, you know, but that's the way it was perceived. I got a letter from Pat Moynihan after I won the Pulitzer and a story had come out on the AP wire, describing *Ironweed* as a book about a baseball player who turns out to be a murderer. Moynihan quoted that back to me in the letter, and he said, "Perhaps you will have a better understanding of what we poor politicians are up against."

INTERVIEWER

The most prominent characters in your novels are seekers after a truth or meaning or experience beyond the repetitive patterns of daily life. Do you find that your own world view changes as a result of creating these characters and moving them through a series of life experiences?

KENNEDY

I think that my world view changes as I write the book. It's

a discovery. The only thing that's really interesting to me is when I surprise myself. It's boring to write things when you know exactly what's going to happen. That's why language was so important to me in journalism. It was the only way you could heighten the drama, or make it funny, or surprising. In *Legs* I was endlessly fascinated to learn how we look at gangsters. I discovered what I thought about mysticism and coincidence when I wrote *Billy*. I feel that *Ironweed* gave me a chance to think about a world most people find worthless. Actually, anybody who doesn't have an idea about what it is to be homeless, or on the road, or lost and without a family, really hasn't thought very much at all. Even though I'd written about this, the small details of that life weren't instantly available to my imagination until I began to think seriously about what it means to sleep in the weeds on a winter night, then wake up frozen to the sidewalk. Such an education becomes part of your ongoing frame of reference in the universe. And if you don't develop Alzheimer's disease or a wet brain, you might go on to write better books. I think that some writers, after an early peaking, go into decline. Fitzgerald seems to me a good example of that. He was writing an interesting book at the end of his life, *The Last Tycoon*, but I don't think it would have been up to his achievement in *Gatsby* or *Tender Is The Night*. But if you don't die, and you're able to sustain your seriousness, I don't think there's any rule that you can't supersede your own early work. I remember an essay by Thomas Mann about Theodor Fontane, the prolific German novelist who believed he was all done somewhere around the age of thirty-nine. But he lived to be a very old man, and published his masterpiece, *Effi Briest*, at age seventy-six. I believe in the capacity of the imagination to mature and I am fond of insisting that I'm not in decline, that the next book is going to be better than the last. It may or may not be, but I have no doubt I know more about how to write a novel, more about what it means to be alive, than I ever have. Whether another dimension of my being has faded, and will refuse to fire my brain into some galvanic achievement, I can't say. We may know more about this when the next book is published.

INTERVIEWER

Did your work in journalism hinder you in writing novels, or was it primarily helpful?

KENNEDY

It was both. It was very difficult to overcome the fact that I was a journalist for a long time. It had to do with the way I looked at material—my feeling that the world was there to be reported upon. Even when I was inventing in those early books—I'm not talking about the ones that were published, I mean the early ones I wrote that weren't published, and all the early stories—I tended to believe that experience alone would save me, that I'd encounter life and therefore be able to report more clearly on it. But the journalist must report on life objectively, and the novelist must reinvent life utterly, and the work has to come up from below instead of down from the top as a journalist receives it. The feeling of insufficient experience was strong for a long time. But experience alone will produce only commonplace novels. The real work is a blend of imagination and language. On the other hand, journalism serves you extraordinarily well because it forces you into situations you would not normally encounter. It thrusts you into spectacles, disasters, high crimes and high art. It forces you to behave in ways that you would not normally behave: being objective in the face of a lying politician, or a movie goddess, or some celebrity figure whose work you've valued all your life, such as Satchmo when I interviewed him. I partly educated myself in writing by interviewing writers. When I came back to live up here from Puerto Rico in 1963, after seven years away, I left most of my literary friends behind in San Juan. I reentered the society here as a freelance and part-time journalist, trying to write novels, and the first thing I did was seek out people like John Cheever, Bernard Malamud, James Baldwin, and Arthur Miller for interviews. I could speak with these men about what was most important to me—literature. That kind of cachet that you have as a journalist is very valuable. Also, journalism forces you into an ethical stance through objectivity. You're forced into understanding that the world is

not as you would like it to be. Yet you certainly cannot report on it your way, unless you become some sort of advocate for a cause. Even when you disagree with a cause you have to give it its due, and that presents you with a chance to understand complexities of human behavior that might otherwise take you a long time to come to. The other thing is that you use the language every day, and one of the pleasures of journalism to me was always being able to see the thing in print the next day and have somebody say, "Hey, that was a good story!" Daily journalism to me was writing as fast as you could, still trying to be some sort of interpreter and entertainer as well as objective reporter. And I was always, from very early on, imbued with the kind of journalism that flowered in the twenties and thirties and forties. People like Mencken, Don Marquis, Westbrook Pegler—I'm not speaking of Pegler's hate-ridden politics, just his ability to turn a sentence—or Red Smith, or so many of the reporters at the *Herald-Tribune* in the forties and fifties, a remarkable newspaper. Some people have this kind of monolithic feeling toward their art and rightfully so. I really consider myself a novelist preeminently but I came out of journalism and I would never in any way try to disown it the way Hemingway did. I think he was wrong-headed from the beginning about the destructive quality of journalism—it was a kind of snobbery; he had elevated himself above it. But what about Stephen Crane, James Agee, and García Márquez? What about Michael Herr and his Vietnam book, *Dispatches*? What a piece of work that is.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any advice for young writers, a way of starting, or a way of looking at one's work as it matures?

KENNEDY

I would think that he or she should discover language and discover the world, a sense of place, and not try to base his or her work only on personal experience. Personal experience as a young person is very limited. We have the great line from Faulkner that the problems of children are not worth writing

about. This applies to adolescence and early sexhood as well. It's not that children in trouble are not great subjects, but what you need is a world and a way of approaching the world. If you have these two things, everything is interesting. It's not what you say, it's the way that you say it. It's a sense of the person's existence, and not the person's experience. It's the matrix translated into language. It's the sense of response, as opposed to problem. So much great literature exists on that level of response, the essential element of some great moderns. Leopold and Molly Bloom respond to their worlds with the most remarkable language of thought. Nabokov's language is everything. Take Cheever's language away and the work dribbles off into absurdity; yet with those golden sentences he's the most durable of writers.

INTERVIEWER

Is sex something that's easy to write about in a book? Why do writers have so much difficulty with it?

KENNEDY

I think writers should research sex in the same way they research historical characters. It's not difficult to write about. What is difficult to write about is the actual pornographic element of sex. That ceases to be interesting. What you need to do is find the surrounding elements, the emotional content of the sexual encounters. Yet another struggle of the genitals is hardly worth writing about. It's done on every street-corner, fifty-five times a magazine. So, you know that's not the point. On the contrary, it's when you discover a character like Kiki Roberts who is Legs Diamond's girlfriend and you look at her, and discover this incredible beauty, obviously a great sex object for Diamond, who endangered his life many times for her. And she, reciprocating constantly. She was a fugitive from justice with him. When you look at that woman, you can begin to imagine what it was about her that led Diamond to behave that way. So that was quite a pleasant thing for me, to re-imagine Kiki Roberts.

INTERVIEWER

Do characters have a way of taking off on their own?

KENNEDY

I recall Nabokov looked on his characters as his galley slaves. But they do have a way of asserting themselves. Hemingway's line was that everything changes as it moves; and that that is what makes the movement that makes the story. Once you let a character speak or act you now know that he acts this way and not another. You dwell on why this is so and you move forward to the next page. This is my method. I'm not interested in formulating a plot to which characters are added like ribbons on a prize cow. The character is the key and when he does something which is new, something you didn't know about or expect, then the story percolates. If I knew, at the beginning, how the book was going to end, I would probably never finish. I knew that Legs Diamond was going to die at the end of the book, so I killed him on page one.

INTERVIEWER

You said before that you don't write novels to make money. Why do you write novels?

KENNEDY

I remember in 1957 I was reading in *Time* magazine about Jack Kerouac's success with *On The Road*. I felt I wasn't saying what I wanted to say in journalism, wasn't saying it in the short stories I'd been writing either. I had no compelling vision of anything, yet I knew the only way I would ever get it would be to give my imagination the time and space to spread out, to look at things in the round. I also felt that not only did I want to write one novel, I wanted to write a series of novels that would interrelate. I didn't know how, but this is a very old feeling with me. I came across a note the other day that I wrote to myself about "the big Albany novel." This was way back, I can't even remember when — long before I wrote *Legs*, even before *The Ink Truck*. It had to be in the middle sixties.

It was a consequence of my early confrontation with the history of Albany when I did a series of articles on the city's neighborhoods in 1963 and 1964. I began to see how long and significant a history we had had, and as I moved along as a part-timer at the *Times-Union*, writing about blacks and civil rights and radicals, I began to see the broad dimension of the city, the interrelation of the ethnic groups. The politics were just incredible—Boss Machine politics, the most successful in the history of the country in terms of longevity. And I realized I could never tell it all in one book.

INTERVIEWER

Is this enormous sort of Yoknapatawpha County in your mind? Do the characters emerge as you think about them? You give the picture of being able to dip into this extraordinary civilization.

KENNEDY

Every time out it's different, but one of the staples is the sense that I have a column of time to work with; for example a political novel that could move from about 1918 to maybe 1930; and in there is a focal point on a character, probably the political boss. But that's not always enough, having a character. I once wrote a novel's worth of notes about three characters and I couldn't write the first sentence of the book. It was all dead in the water. There has to be a coalescence of influences that ignite and become viable as a story.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think the ignition thing is? It's rather frightening that you work on these things and do not know whether it's going to come together. How do you know?

KENNEDY

You don't. It's an act of faith.

INTERVIEWER

Ironweed, *Billy Phelan* and *Legs* were reviewed and marketed as a trilogy of Albany novels.

KENNEDY

Trilogy was never my word and I don't want it to be the word. Cycle is my word. It started with *The Ink Truck*, and continues with *Quinn's Book*, the newest novel. I called it a cycle because I don't know when I'm going to stop. As long as I write books, it seems I have enough variety of intention, both in subject matter and in approach to the material, that I'm not going to be bored by my opportunities. People say, "Why don't you write about someplace else?" Well, I don't think that there's anyplace any more interesting to write about. I don't *have* to go anyplace else. The more I stay here, the more interesting the cycle becomes. If I'm able to convey a society in transition or a society in embryo, that's worth doing. In one way I'm really trying to write history. But history is only a tool to ground me in telling a story about what it means to be alive.

INTERVIEWER

What is the feeling when you're done with a book?

KENNEDY

I remember the day I finished *Ironweed*. I came down and I said, "I'm finished." My wife was there and one of my good friends; they had read most of the book along the way and they sat down and read the ending. Somehow they didn't respond the way I wanted them to respond. I was thinking of an abstract reader who would say what every writer wants you to say to him: "This is the best thing I ever read in my life." I knew something was wrong, though I didn't know what; I knew the elements of the ending should be very powerful. I thought about it and their lack of proper response. After dinner I went back upstairs and rewrote the ending, adding a page and a half. I brought that down and then they said, "This is the best thing I've ever read in my life."

—Douglas R. Allen
Mona Simpson

Who's Never Heard of Circus Trots?

François Maspéro

Of course I've heard of the Circus Trots. In May 1940, Comrade Pinardier (for that was his *nom de guerre*, not his name) found himself in Brussels, cut off by the German invasion. With his militant Trotskyist past, how could he get out from under the net? As his comrades in misfortune—anti-Nazi exiles, socialist activists, communists, revolutionaries, internationalists, Jews and freemasons—were as stranded as he was, he thought of buying for a pittance a circus that had been abandoned like some shipwrecked ark on the beach at Knokke-le-Zoute. The owners had fled from the bombing on their bicycles and were never seen again. The purchase price was immediately amortized by Bahadur Shah, the circus's sole and aged, in fact rather senile, elephant, being sentenced to death, and whose cleverly butchered carcass, tenderized by a local expert who had learned his trade in the Belgian Congo, fed the entire population through the black market and even a detachment of Wehrmacht engineers short of protein and

partial to high flavors. The tusks passed to an Antwerp dealer in return for a banker's draft bearing a string of noughts, negotiable in Caracas. And so the very first circus in the history of Trotskyism came into being. The new partners had no difficulty in allocating the various roles: teachers, doctors, engineers, journalists, artists, former Reichstag deputies quickly became first-rate circus performers. Pinardier was the tiger-tamer; Slovakian society ladies of ripe years learned to curtsy on the floor in spangled leotards; a celebrated Hamburg soprano did pirouettes on a dappled draught-horse; a goateed dentist became a human cannonball; a (beardless) psychoanalyst from Copenhagen slashed violently at Gordian knots and then showed his bewildered audience perfectly smooth and uncut ropes; a Bavarian surrealist painter performed amazing feats on giant roller-skates. The band was Pinardier's pride and joy: never was the *March of the Gladiators* or *Colonel Bogey* played by a more distinguished group of temporarily incognito celebrities. Just the names of the pianist and the violinist who were playing, respectively, trombone and triangle would have set off riots in the Metropolitan's box-office queue. The only member of the team who caused a problem to begin with was a high-ranking Polish cavalry officer who had the awkward habit, after taking three turns round the floor, of forgetting where he was and of charging apoplectically at the front row of the stalls, almost always occupied by bewildered German soldiers in uniform. In the end, of course, they all got used to it, and the clowns would rush after him and drag him backwards. This hilarious act very quickly became the high point of the whole show.

They took to the road and moved on slowly but always in a southerly direction. They crossed the prohibited zone, the occupied zone, the demarcation line, the checkpoints and control barriers, they crossed the lot with their forged papers, so obviously forged that they ended up looking genuine: the controllers were after more serious quarry than tumblers who set up their tent-pole each evening in the main square, sometimes even in bombed-out cities. Over the border into France, the three tigers took their leave. The two females, Scheherazade

and Cleopatra, died of suffocation or, more probably, from the mortal boredom induced by the overwhelmingly theoretical arguments which Comrade Pinardier insisted on substituting for his predecessor's whip when he wanted to make them roar. Sultan, the male, maddened by grief, escaped one evening in a suicidal depression somewhere near Courrières-lès-Lens. His tracks ran out in a dark alley, all of whose inhabitants, a few days later, suffered dramatic fits of diarrhoea. This was immediately put down to delayed-action poison in food put about by the Fifth Column, without anyone suspecting that tiger-meat (excluding that of beasts fed on a rice-only diet) is, as all the world's big-game hunters know, highly laxative. Minds were so preoccupied at that time with much more essential matters that, in similar fashion, no one really raised an eyebrow when all the children from the alley came to school the following winter wearing Bengal tigerskin jackets, trousers, and even socks.

But the loss of the big cats was not enough to deprive Pinardier of the pleasure of exercising his new-found talent as a tamer. He had kept the tigresses' pelts and had had them properly cured and dressed. Two companions put them on every evening and the act went on as a parody. From then on, at the end of the act, the tigers became the tamers and made Pinardier roar, jump, and vault through burning hoops. Topsy Gerry audiences—and French ones as well—split their sides laughing, and Comrade Pinardier explained to his troupe that he had created the very first authentically political circus act: with the roles reversed, his act became an allegory prefiguring the reversal of the dialectic of master and slave.

The escapade nearly came unstuck in the Massif Central, when the clowns tried to form a splinter-group. They had grasped some while before that they too could insert a political message, indeed a subversive one, into their dialogue. For example, when High-and-Mighty got a kick from Harlequin and held his backside whilst screaming: "I got it in the arse," he always turned to the crowd of guffawing adjutants in their field-green uniforms to ask them: "So why are you buggers laughing, then? You'll get it in the arse too, you know," which

provoked another wave of sentimental and unsuspecting hilarity. But Pinardier saw this as a dangerously revisionist deviation. Revolutions are not made by witty lines, and over-reliance on such tactics could jeopardize the overall goal. The splinterers drafted a manifesto. The dentist's wife, whose job as the oracle-in-the-well left her plenty of time for serious thought, negotiated a compromise which resulted (a) in the drawing up of a provisional agenda for action, which she defined as a *circu-lar* action, and (b) in democratic elections to a *circu-lar assembly*, whose powers could be revoked at any time. In short, the circus managed to get to Marseilles in one piece. It had even grown considerably in the course of its travels and had acquired in its train a whole long string of floor-hands, firemen, ticket-collectors, set-breakers, dung-collectors (whose job was to run round the circus floor behind the horses' hindquarters with a spade and bucket), stake-testers, safety-net inspectors, sawdust-sprinklers and men who had water poured over them, all of them running away from something, and including a flea-trainer who was a Reader in Genetics at the Collège de France. In Marseilles Pinardier recruited a few more former fringe surrealists and, equipped with a perfectly legal and above-board contract for a twenty-city tour from Tegucigalpa to Dawson City, which extracted as many genuine visas for as many forged passports as he presented, he shipped his whole troupe onto the *Paul-Lemerle* on 10 December 1941, with a well-merited sense of mission accomplished. Still today you come across emeritus professors and biologists with Nobel prizes who seem moved when they hear you mention the apparently arcane password of *Circus Trots*. It is said, besides, that the chin-bearded dentist would not give up his cannonball career until his wife left him for a man who did an act with wallabies: he loaded his cannon with four times the usual amount of propellant and was blown right through the tent-canvas, sky-high, making a reality of the title of his act, *The Blast of Death*. As for Pinardier, who has dropped his *nom de guerre*, he sometimes dreams, when he takes the podium at proletarian and revolutionary gatherings, and when the frenzied assembly yells "Fascists out! out!

out!," he sometimes dreams, as he raises his hand to bellow "Comrades!" at the top of his voice, he still does sometimes imagine that he is cracking a long whip against shining knee-high boots and beating the braided frogs and loops on the fancy tunic that covered his corseted chest. But what even he doesn't know is that in the back row one of his former clowns—who runs a dismal little tailoring business in Rue des Ecouffes—is muttering: "You've got it in the arse," as he plots the next factional in-fight.

*—translated from the French
by David Bellos*

David Bottoms

Last Nickel Ranch: Plains, Montana

In the living room of the trailer, the father of the woman
I love calls the family into a huddle.

Dinner is over, the charcoal is ash on the grill.
Through the kitchen window, I watch rain drifting
like a ghost across the Cabinet mountains.
We're leaving now,
and it's time for prayer.

The family circles to a hug and calls me in,
and for a moment, silence. Wind shakes
the tin sheets roofing the deck, the lambs
bleat from the hill behind us.
I think of prayer
and the humility necessary for prayer.

Then a squall of feathers from the guinea coop,
and in the corral
the burros scuffle against the water trough.
Hands join hands, and I catch the eagle's shadow

slicing down the ridge, one dark
blade of muscle
beautiful for its singularity.

I know what I've valued.
Last night I heard a coyote howling off the ridge
and went to the window.
In the darkness behind the glass
I saw myself, and behind my eyes the stars flew
into the pines.

Cynthia Nadelman

I Bought a Camera

I bought a camera, though there were
many reasons not to.

In spite of the reasons not to
(because of the reasons not to),
I bought a camera.

I took the camera down the Blue Ridge,
through the Smokies, on to Nashville and Mississippi.
The first shots were done
on the way, in Philadelphia.

Friends' faces, looking at the ceiling, quizzically
aimed at the lens, later squinting in the sun
on a doorstep, told the story: this
was an unaccustomed view.

We were not in the habit of hugging or memorializing.
So what was I doing behind this tiny machine, checking for
distance and light—O.K. or not—corralling them
into a common space? What, in fact, was I doing
on vacation? I said I was practicing. This explained
the camera.

To begin with, subjects drifted in, like
the hang glider against the velvety hills.
Next, the two of us fishing on a rock, each
individually. I couldn't show you reeling
in the second half of the rod
thrown midstream on an exuberant cast.

Too preoccupied helping pull.
Then the rain forced us to strip
to swimsuits and run to the shelter
of the campground ladies' room. Some dry youngsters
in a car were entertained by the scene.
I got busy wiping the camera.

And we moved on, learning to edit
and eliminate. As you can't go
everywhere, you can't photograph everything.
It sounds easy now.

Mind, I had shopped around, weighed my need
and my needs—none was great—and had
found the best deal. Transactions
usually cancel doubts.

I got an octagonal house, a
riverboat, Spanish moss, you against a
hydrangea (we could have posed with Roy
Acuff), Brahma bulls, me supine in a brook,
a factory in Kentucky, wet cloths on hot heads.
I grew fond of my pocket camera with the excellent lens.

Then I lost the camera.

Most replaceable among the missing that night
I came home to a ransacked apartment, it rankled still.
I thought of stopping there. I
had had my fun.

But taken by that close-up of a magnolia—or was it
the toylike body? like a trick squirtgun—
the challenge of a price war, or the next trip,
I had to duplicate this matter.

Live a picture, steal a moment, interchange them,
say I am
and see.
By all means, buy a camera!

Three Epithalamia by Georges Perec

Epithalamium for Sophie Binet and
Michel Dominault

On this beautiful Saturday in May
Sophie has married Michel
and Michel has married Sophie

They have married
and they are now together
like Aucassin and Nicolette
and like nut cake and honey
like hand and piano
table and chair
soup and ladle
tench and hook
science and doubt
pen and drawing
dove and millet
hospital and silence
candle and bed warmer
camomile tea and madeleine
and even couscous and chick peas

It's a delectable morning
the sun lights up the countryside
bees are gathering honey
a butterfly delicately alights by a mimosa
sheep are bleating
in the distance bells are ringing
everything is calm and peaceful

At the very end of the little wood the vast planet begins
 its lakes its oceans its steppes
 its hills its plains its oases
 its sand dunes
 its palaces its museums its islands its ports of call
 its lovely automobiles glistening in the rain
 its white-bonneted Salvationists singing carols on Christmas Eve
 its bowlered worthies in conference at the *tabac* on Place Saint
 Sulpice
 its mustachio'd sea captains exuding patchouli and lilac
 its tennis champions hugging at the end of a match
 its Indians with their calumet seated by a sandalwood totem pole
 its mountain climbers attacking Popocatapetl
 its eager canoeists paddling down the Mississippi
 its Anabaptists mischievously nodding their heads as they discuss
 the Bible
 its little Balinese women dancing on cocoa plantations
 its philosophers in peaked caps arguing about Condillac's ideas
 in outmoded tea rooms
 its pin-up girls in bathing suits astride docile elephants
 its impassive Londoners bidding a no-trump little slam

But here the sky is blue
 Let's forget the weight of the world
 a bird is singing at the very top of the house
 cats and dogs drowse by the fireplace
 where a huge log is slowly burning up
 You hear the ticking of the clock

This little poem
 where only simple words have been used
 words like daisy and broomstick
 like lady-bird and cream sauce
 like croissant and nonchalance
 and not words like palimpsest, pitchblende, cumulonimbus,
 decalcomania, stethoscope, machicolation, or
 anticonstitutionally

has been specially composed
on the occasion of these nuptials

Let us wish Sophie and Michel
years and years of rejoicing

like the thousand years gone by
 in which Philemon and Baucis
each May are born into the world
 she as linden, he as oak

Lines read at the wedding of Alix-Cléo Blanchette and Jacques Roubaud

Alix-Cléo has married Jacques
and Jacques has married Alix-Cléo

This is a fortunate coincidence
and so today
they are both allied and bound together
in the manner of bird and branch
of Aucassin and Nicolette
of table and chair
of science and doubt
of desert and oasis
of linden and oak
of ink and story
of day and night
of oblivion and vestige
of bee and maple

It's a lovely June day
the sun is shining above Ile de la Cité
on their transistor radios booksellers at their stalls are listening
to Heinrich Biber's *Rosary Sonatas*
harassed tourists climb the steps of Sacré-Coeur
on rue de la Huchette blue-jeaned Dutchmen are playing
banjos and bagpipes

The whole world stretches out around us
its unfathomable oceans
its lakes, its steppes, its streams,
its hills and permafrost
its sand dunes, its hidden treasures, its islands, its ports of call
its "black gold" and "white coal"
its bauxites and rare terrains
its basilicas, its haunted castles, its ruined keeps
its Salvationists in pastel-pink raincoats singing carols on
Christmas Eve

its bespectacled notaries reading their evening paper by the
 light of oil lamps
 its retired colonels in conference at the *tabac* on Rue Saint-
 Louis-en-l'Île
 its disbanding revellers emerging from outmoded nightclubs
 its slant-eyed Cossacks paddling down the Yenisei in birch-
 bark canoes
 its day-trippers in berets attacking the Ballon d'Alsace
 its austere Jansenists reciting the Old Testament
 its circus ballerinas standing on their obedient chargers
 its D. Litt.'s arguing about Judeo-Christian expression in the
 discourse of Hölderlin
 its obese Irishwomen buying cans of beer and salted pickles
 in a Bronx delicatessen

Here the sky is blue or soon will be
 Let's forget the age's stridencies
 tornadoes and fog
 Let's listen to the birds singing
 the cats purring in the library alongside Bescherelle's
 Dictionary
 quiet daily sounds
 the heart beating

These occasional lines
 which do not concern
 either purple balustrades
 or sunken coral water-walled
 or concupiscent curds
 or lady-birds
 or subterranean locusts
 or the Constitution of Eighteen Forty-Eight
 have been written for the inauguration of this betrothal

Let us wish Alix-Cléo and Jacques
years of rejoicing and happiness
Let us salute them
and to the east
 may the black jet of extreme youth salute them
and to the south
 may the turquoise blue of adulthood salute them
and to the west
 may the yellow abalone of nothingness salute them
 that cannot be conceived of or spoken
and to the north
 may the white shell of the Resurrection salute them

and may the Southern Cross salute them
and may the evening star salute them
and every constellation
and every nebula
and may they at break of dawn
when the surround whitens
journey full circle around the edge of earth and heaven

Wedding of Kmar Bendana and Nouredine Mechri

1

My lady of rare amber
Armada moored in the roads of Madeira
Ebony tree
Marble meander

Year after year finding me ready to surrender

2

Unimaginable laughter of Dido or Aeneas
Dune smell
Golden cloud
Rut flooded with a last shower

Saying nothing
Knotting a calico quilt

Queen in king made one

3

Board my forsaken drake
Nomad of my shadow world

Give me my name
My savior
My soul

4

Give me that murmuring
the echo route
where this speaking begins
My fired heart disturbs black ash
Rough whisper of a golden horn
Chrome or mercury illusion

An unknown rending of sweetness
Mine, like my own trembling

5

My love my golden number
beautiful sweeper of my mist
beautiful burglar of my clouds
knot at the confines of my dwelling
a blindfold embroidered with dawn

6

Black ink
determines this still slender code
the world's unscathed memory
A rock, menhir, warehouse
Dormant chemistry of a gigantic oil rig
Cherokee Indian, Chinese orchid

A cedarwood chest of drawers,
A smell of beeswax, bark, caraway

Admire in my mirror
My bride wreathed in dawn
My Queen, my Diana, my Golden Bream,
A sprig of arum diffuses its scent
Laughing over nothings
over a crumb,
over a loosened ribbon
over a swim at the beach
over someone singing to the beat of a derbouka

Loving enough to die

Ancient spell
Rooted in the very heart of this modern world

Wedding

like sweetwater
like a hoop, a round,
a piece of chalk
a marketplace in Manchuria
a tile in the corridor
fragrance of coriander
a cadence on an accordion

My friend my own heart
Give me an iron memory
of this world curved like a locust
An armored memory

Memory of my own Rue du Caire
 Memory of the buccaneer
 of Cerberus's deck hand
 at the edge of a carbon sea

10

Happiness consecrated to my noontime concord
 to the marble of my dwelling
 to the murmurings of my mouth
 Hot shadow of my diadem
 A radio crackles a love ballad
 a fly drones
 Babouche in a corner of my room
 a dog barks

Sunday, on Rue du Maroc
 Sunday

—translated from the French
 by Harry Mathews

Translator's note: These three "nuptial songs" date from 1980 and 1981; they first appeared as pamphlet 19 in the series published as La Bibliothèque oulipienne. I found it impossible to keep in translation the attractive procedure the author followed in writing them, limiting himself to the letters in the names of bride and groom.

Where three quoted phrases appear in the second poem, I have substituted Wallace Stevens for Stéphane Mallarmé.

—H.M.

The Nature of Some Things

Karen Latuchie

In the late spring, at the end of a day that was marked by nothing in particular, something just under the surface of the ground changed. Some degree of warmth was reached, or some level of moisture. Something vague and ill-defined became essential and made its way like a signal along the lace of tree roots in the backyard. By the next afternoon, the ground was pocked with small holes and the trees were full of cicadas which had emerged from underground cocoons as nymphs, wrestled out of their fifth and last impermanent skins, and, with perfect and mature tenacity, attached themselves to branches. Late in the day, the cicadas got in a few good minutes of song. Echoing between four young trees my father had planted the year before, the rasping crescendos of this insect declaration suddenly filled the backyard with a great noise. We stood as a family at the kitchen window. There was nothing to see except the last wash of daylight giving over to night. When, all at once, it was black outside, the cicadas were silent.

They were screaming again when I woke the next morning. It was their first full day as adults. When I came out of my

room, my father was walking resolutely down the stairs. Without breaking stride he lit his first cigarette of the day. The plume of smoke shifted in his wake and rolled up the stairs as he continued down to the back door. I joined my mother in the kitchen. She was at the window in a long cotton wrapper, her arms held tightly around her waist.

"What's Daddy doing?" I asked. I leaned on the windowsill and pressed my nose to the screen.

"Don't get too close," she said, releasing one of her arms to pull me back.

"Why?" I asked, trying to shrug off her hand.

"I just don't like those bugs."

"Mom, there's a screen."

"Just don't get too close," she said. But she let me be; my father had come into view.

He was wearing his pointy leather shoes and his tailored brown suit which had a sharp iridescence, like the back of a Japanese beetle. He looked strong and careless, and his suit shimmered as he walked. He looked out of place in our backyard which was new and unadorned. The four trees defined a box inside the box shape of the yard. Along the property line were shrubs which someday would be beautiful and give us privacy. They were green tufts now; one or two of them had a few flowers sticking out at angles. My father looked at them impatiently as he approached one of the trees.

"My God, they're awful looking," my mother said.

"Daddy said they don't bite or anything."

"Maybe not, but, my God, they're ugly." She pulled her arms more tightly around herself. "And they have a very funny smell. Do you smell it?" I took a deep breath but I didn't smell anything.

Outside, my father was standing under the pin oak whose branches usually had the delicacy of a pen and ink drawing. Now they looked gnarly, abraded. It was the cicadas, sucking sap and shrieking. My father stared up into the small canopy of the tree. His cigarette was clamped in his teeth and he was squinting against the smoke rising into his eyes.

"He'll go deaf, for God's sake," my mother said.

The trunk of the tree was studded with the abandoned skins of the cicadas. Even from the kitchen, through the screen, they looked ghostly: perfect replicas of the insects, but empty and silent. My father brushed some of the skins away. They shattered and floated to the ground glinting in the sunlight. He grasped the tree trunk, so narrow his fingertips almost touched, and shook. His body rocked with the force he unleashed against the tree. For a minute, the tree itself was still, but then it began to undulate: from the trunk under his hands to the uppermost leaves as if it were a piece of stiff cloth being unfurled. My father leaned into the task and made the branches dance.

I began to hear a different sound inside the cicadas' scream: a dull scratching that had silence in it as well. It was the insect-laden branches rattling against each other. Slowly, as one by one the insects put all their energy into hanging on, the rattle replaced the scream. In all the other trees the cicadas were singing, but in the pin oak they had been quieted. Now, they made an unwitting noise, a clumsy music. My father shook harder. Suddenly, as if the signal had come up from the roots into the sap, the cicadas burst from the tree. They rose like a fiery explosion and then converged into a sinuous plume, their wings crackling, as they followed each other to a different roost. My father shook the pin oak until it ran dry of the insects and settled back into its own green. Then he moved to the next tree and the next until each of the four young trees was unburdened. Each tree sent up its swarm in a huge burst and with each burst the air came to life and then stilled into the hot blue morning which went on being full of the cicadas' scream.

Day after day my father carried out his tree-shaking ritual: cigarette clamped between his teeth, brown suit on workdays, t-shirt and Bermudas on the weekend, one-handed and with an umbrella if it rained. Most mornings, my mother watched from the kitchen window. I could see the cicadas explode out of the pin oak from my seat at the kitchen table; I only had to crane my neck a bit. Then the shades came down. My

mother had begun pulling them down every morning: to keep the house cool, she explained. But she eventually admitted to another reason. "I'd close the windows too, if it wasn't so hot," she said one morning. She blew on her coffee. "These bugs could drive a person crazy."

A year's time had always seemed to me to have an uneven oval shape: the winter spreading out dark and long on the bottom, the fall and spring taking up the short sides, the summer rising into the top, perfectly defined curve like a radiant crown. But in this year the cicadas turned the early edge of summer ragged. They appeared three weeks before the end of school but they seemed to bring a leaden heat that was comprehensible only in the dead middle of the season. In their scream, full of impatience and demand, I heard summer being ticked away.

We ate dinner in the early evenings when there was still light and cicada noise left to the day. "Why do they scream?" I asked one night.

My father looked at me and then at my mother. "You see?" he said, fixing his eyes on her, nodding his head slowly. "You've got her scared of them too."

"I'm not really scared of them," I said, the words disappearing the instant they left my mouth.

"I'm *not* scared of them," my mother said slowly. "I just don't like them."

I followed their volley of words with my eyes, one side of the table to the other.

"Oh. I see," my father said, his mouth forming a thin, rigid smile. "You just don't like them. That's why you keep the shades down all day long and only lift them when the noise stops? You don't think she can tell that you're scared?"

"I haven't done or said anything to scare her," my mother said, bristling. "Maybe she just doesn't like the sound of their screaming either."

"They don't *scream*. They vibrate their abdomens!"

"Don't shout at me!"

"I'm not shouting," my father said, his voice lower, but still strained. "I'm just trying to make a point. You can't barricade yourself inside the house until they're gone!"

"Don't be so sure," my mother said, her jaw held tight. She bolted up from her chair, swirled the bottom of her wrapper open and took long strides out of the kitchen. Her hair, long and deep red, streamed out behind her like flame blown from its source.

My father watched her go, nodded his head when she slammed the bedroom door, and lit a cigarette. I cut another piece of chicken and chewed it as quietly as I could. I gazed down at my plate, twirled my knife in one hand.

"They're not screaming, Marilyn," he finally said. His voice was more normal now and there was resignation in it. "They vibrate their abdomens. It's their mating call." I nodded my head though he wasn't looking at me. He turned sideways, crossed his legs and blew smoke toward the ceiling. His head, backlit by the window, flattened out. When he stopped bringing the cigarette to his lips, there seemed to be no dimension to his face at all. Outside, the cicadas suddenly grew louder: a final call before night. But inside, the house was filling up with silence.

I cleaned the kitchen after my father left the room. He disappeared down the stairs to the den and my mother stayed behind her closed door. The living room light wasn't turned on, the hallway to the bedrooms was dark: the kitchen was an island of light. I walked plates and silver and glasses from the table to the sink, turning deliberately as if I were swimming laps, trying to keep my breathing steady. The edges of the counter and the cabinets seemed to grow sharper, and the corners of the room looked deep and hidden. The hair on my arms stood straight up like antennae desperate to pick up some small sound outside the boundaries of the kitchen where I was making as little noise as I could. I washed every dish with care, wiped down the table, swept the floor, but still the time came when I was finished. I turned off the light and immediately felt lost, felt that if it were suddenly switched on again

I would be somewhere that I didn't recognize and that would never come to feel familiar.

I found a wall and groped my way to my parents' room. The door was still closed, and outlined in thin rays of light. I put my mouth so close to the frame that I thought I could feel the light on my lips, and I could hear my mother filing her nails. I whispered "Mom," very low. I could hardly hear myself. Then I whispered it again, a little louder. And again and again, each time screwing up my courage to give the word a little more punch. It took me several minutes to get my voice to its normal plateau, and then to say the word with enough inflection so that it cut through the thick silence, penetrated the door, and rose above the soft rasp of the emery board. "MOM," almost like a question.

She stopped filing. "What is it Marilyn?" I had wanted her voice to be more inviting, or yearning.

"Good night," I said, again almost like a question.

The filing started. "Good night honey."

Lying in bed I heard a neighbor's phone ring. I heard my mother take a shower and my father come upstairs to the kitchen and pour himself a drink. I was up very late and then very early, but my eyes were closed when I heard the cicadas start in at daybreak. I put my questions about them to the encyclopedia during that day. I learned their life cycle: years and years of a blind, dark pubescence before roaring out of the ground and becoming adults in a matter of hours. It was a drastic way of life.

There were six kids around my own age living on my street. Keith was the oldest, a year into junior high. Mark and Randy were twins, easy to tell apart. Paula was short and loud. Isabel's straight black hair was so long she could sit on it. Rita could walk on her hands. We had all been together at the end of the last summer on the afternoon when a rusty nail had punctured the bottom of my foot. Our houses had been new, part of a development that had just been completed; we had known each other for only a few weeks. But when I got back from the

doctor, they were all waiting to hear the details. And none of them turned away as I explained that when the wound had been cleaned, a small piece of the sole of my sneaker and a patch of my sock had come out with the rust.

Now, on the first morning of the new summer vacation, I headed to Keith's house. I walked quickly, keeping my head low, wary of cicadas flitting wildly from tree to tree. There seemed to be fewer in the branches than there were in flight. They looked bigger now, more armored and gruesome. They sounded frenzied in a way I hadn't noticed before. They filled the air with their bodies as well as with their rasp. The noise was like a thick liquid, parting just enough for me to get through.

When I arrived, the six others were already in Keith's basement. Nobody wanted to be outside. But sanctuary indoors was edgy. Keith's mother was on the phone; her voice filtered down to us sounding shrill with complaint and her laughter had an iciness in it. We left there and moved from house to house, but everywhere we were crowded by details of adult life. The twins' father had his dental office at home and his nurse came into Mark's room to tell us that our voices were disturbing the patients. She had hard, pale eyes and she held her mouth so tightly, her lips disappeared. We could hear her thighs rubbing together when she walked away. At Rita's we had just settled in to watch TV when her grandfather came down from his room, pushed Isabel out of "his" chair, and lit a cigar. His cough was loud and incessant. He kept spitting into a handkerchief. We could barely hear the TV. When we left he waved us out of the room impatiently as if it had been his idea that we should go. But it was worse at my house. Maybe my friends didn't see it, but when my mother came downstairs to do the laundry, she seemed to careen toward the center of the room as if she thought the ugliness of the insect's sound had seeped into the outer wall and she was afraid to go near it.

Over the next few days the seven of us made the rounds of our houses many times, leaving and entering them on waves

of noise and nerves. And then, five weeks after they arrived, and with the same hidden logic of their emergence, the cicadas were gone, all of them dead at once. One morning their buzzing didn't begin. That evening, my parents took their drinks outside on the deck. I was sitting in the yard, leaning against the pin oak, my back to the house. I listened to their conversation: the words were indistinct, but the tones were familiar and comfortably far away. The sound of the ice in their drinks was clear and high; the whine of the mosquitoes in my ears painfully sharp. There were cicada wings scattered on the ground around me: birds had consumed every other part of the dying insects. When I picked up a wing to examine it, it crumbled between my fingers.

The next morning, I left the house as if it were the first day of summer. I felt like a diver, springboarding myself out the front door, ready to reenter a familiar element. But I landed in a vast stillness I hardly recognized. The screen door shutting behind me sounded like a rifle shot. The crack lingered in the air for an instant and then dissipated like a wisp of smoke. One by one my friends came out of their houses and with each one, a closing screen door shot its sound high into the immense quiet. I looked up and down the street: it was all identical houses, perfectly-edged lawns, small foliage. The colors were lurid in the morning light. The street seemed blasted open into the stillness by the heat. The cicadas had left this behind. It was as if their presence had caused basic molecules to rearrange.

The woods seemed the only place to go. They rose up at the end of our block in a great tangle: a refuge and a dare. We crossed their threshold into air that had a velvety thickness. We lowered our voices and picked our way through the undergrowth. There were patches of ground so damp and unfounded that when I walked over them chills of fear came up through the soles of my feet. Everywhere I looked there was decay and possibility. And out of the corner of my eye, I saw Keith sneak up behind Isabel. I hung back and watched. He

grabbed her black braid and pulled. Her head went back and her eyes closed. His hands climbed one over the other up the rope of her hair. The moment seemed to lengthen. Her back arched slowly.

"Look at this!" It was Paula, yelling from somewhere ahead of us. Her voice made time jump back to normal. Keith flipped Isabel's braid into her face and ran off. Isabel found her footing and followed him, and I followed her to where Paula stood. The others came up around us. The noise of our footsteps stopped.

Paula had spotted an old farmhouse set in a clearing surrounded by high trees. It was painted white and had a porch and gables. Storm doors led to a basement. There was a weather vane in the shape of a rooster, motionless on the roof. There was a garden planted in three rows, and a clothesline with wooden pins pushed to one end. I wondered if the plants in the garden were flowers or vegetables.

"Who lives there?" Isabel asked quietly. No one knew.

"Maybe they're the ones who owned the land our houses are built on," Mark said. His voice was dreamy.

"If they used to own the land, they'd be rich now from selling it," Keith said, turning to look at Mark. "And they wouldn't live in that house if they were rich."

"They might," I said quickly. "If they were aliens and they needed humans for food."

Keith turned toward me slowly. He was smiling. Mark shook his head. Paula's laugh came out loud and rowdy. She added tunnels and torture chambers to the house. Randy put mutants in locked rooms. We were all laughing now and the sound of it goaded us on. The people who lived in the house became ghosts, then white-slave traders, then evil spirits. They were invisible, watching us, coming up behind us. Our words grew more daunting and dramatic as the afternoon passed. There was nothing to undermine our determination to grow bold. I could feel the summer taking its natural shape again, arcing us high above the guarded world we reluctantly returned to in the early evening.

We went back to the woods the next day and climbed into a tree at the edge of the clearing. Each of us found a branch with a view of the farmhouse and settled in as if we had come to the generous lap of a storyteller. We had expected to see someone in the yard, or a car in the driveway, a curtain pulled aside, clothes on the line. But the scene was unchanged. It had the perfect stillness of a diorama. Rita climbed to the highest branch she could reach.

"It looks the same," she said, her voice falling down to us. "Maybe nobody lives there."

My eyes settled on the garden. I could tell it hadn't been planted too long ago. "Well it looks like no one's home now anyway," Keith said in a low, expressionless voice, as if he'd heard my thought, and then heard fear in it. No one argued with him. And no one took up the stories we'd been telling about the house the day before. The eeriness we'd concocted for it seemed silly now. Leaning back against the tree trunk, I felt the thudding of someone's leg swinging impatiently against a branch. Then I felt another join in and another until the tree was shuddering. I don't remember which one of us said "Let's go take a look," but it seemed so inevitable that we all might have said it at the same time.

We entered the yard and stood together, stiff-limbed and surprised. Up close the house looked large and normal. Any of us might have lived in a house like this one. My father could have come home from the office and opened this door just as easily as he did our own. The shades were all pulled down here too. Someone had planted a hedge of bushes years ago: they were tall and full. It was tomatoes that were growing in the garden.

We moved in on the house, each of us gravitating to a different window. I went to a door and could see, in the separation where the curtains almost met, a slice of the stove and of a spice rack above it. It looked airless and remote in there, but the longer I looked the easier it was for me to imagine myself part of what I was seeing. When I heard glass breaking, I knew that one of us had gotten in. The world behind me

disappeared. The door opened from inside. I walked into the kitchen. I felt exhilarated and defiant. The other five were right behind me. We closed the door.

We stood in a cluster at the center of the room. Mark was the first to move. He opened a jar of peppercorns and sent them rolling across the floor. They gave off a delicate, nervous sound. Rita followed him. She dusted the stove with curry powder and made a comet trail of oregano flakes on the counter. No one said a word. Keith turned and swept the other spice jars off the rack. The noise they made hitting the floor was harsh and brilliant. Paula looked to each one of us as she swung her arm up and back and closed her hand on the rim of a bowl sitting on the counter. She lofted it in the air above our heads. It hung there for an instant. We scattered in time to watch it smash where we had just been standing. The shards slithered along the floor toward us. We scattered again.

We ran from room to room, banging into each other, knocking into furniture, gathering speed and energy. Our voices rose in a wave of sound. The house seemed more and more fragile as we raced through it, more and more our own.

I found myself in a bedroom. I saw everything in an instant. The plain white spread on a double bed, a table on either side, framed photographs, lamps, a chest of drawers. I felt the absence of people amid all the signs of their lives. And I felt myself reaching for the spread and yanking it back so that it billowed up and sank in a heap. When I tore the sheet, tiny threads floated up into the air and the rip of the cotton was like a bolt of electricity let loose in the room. I ran from it and into the living room. I could hear the others all around me. The house was loud, as if the noise we were making was coming from within the walls or up from the floor. The place shook. Keith came into the living room. I jumped up on the coffee table. He was watching me. I jumped again and again, flinging my arms up and down to add power to my weight. The table groaned and buckled. I leapt off as it collapsed. Keith grabbed one of the broken legs and dragged it across the seat of a sea-green chair: the stuffing came out in soft

white wads. I scooped some up and threw them back at Keith as I ran from the room.

I sprinted around the house. There was evidence of us everywhere. I heard all the voices in the kitchen and ran toward them. Paula was leaning into the refrigerator throwing jams and relishes, mayonnaise and mustard out behind her. I had to dodge the flying bottles. I could hear the twins' voices on the second floor. I looked through the vent in the kitchen ceiling and saw them pounding on the grating from above. Keith was trying to move the stove. Rita and Isabel and I ran to his aid and we rocked it between us, tearing it from its connecting pipes, thundering it away from the wall and crashing it on to the floor. The sound was huge, but above it I heard Mark and Randy shouting. The grating was hanging by one hinge, and in the vent hole I could see their faces, red with effort and excitement. Looking at them, I felt the heat of my own skin.

I turned and picked up bottles from the floor, smashing them against the counter. Rita pulled dishes from the cabinets and dropped them around her. Isabel picked up the ones that didn't break and hurled them into the sink. Keith pulled up the unglued edges of the linoleum. I heard a tearing sound above us and then several more and suddenly there were pillow feathers coming down through the vent in the ceiling. Slowly at first, and then so furiously that they were in every breath we took. Paula yelled for the twins to stop and it was the first clear word any of us had said since we'd come into the house. We all yelled with her the second time. Our voices seemed muffled by the feathers. I swept the air with my hand to keep them out of my mouth. Randy and Mark finally heard. They looked down.

We were standing in food and broken pottery and glass. Somewhere in another room, something broken settled noisily into something else broken. Each of us looked around the kitchen, carefully avoiding the others' eyes. The last feathers came down slowly.

We ran from the farmhouse at the same time, but each of

us was running alone. I felt as though something were following me, keeping pace with me effortlessly though I was running as hard as I ever had in my life. When Keith passed in front of me I saw his face briefly. He looked like he felt what I did. But I could see that nothing was following him, except me.

Neither of my parents was at home. I walked slowly from room to room and I began to imagine slashing the seat of my mother's deep blue sofa, dropping my father's bull-shaped paperweight onto the glass coffee table, breaking the rungs of a chair. Each image had a thrilling exactness. I could feel the heft of the paperweight and hear the report of splintering wood. I had to make myself look at the furniture and see its particular heaviness. In the kitchen I remarked out loud how smart it was to build the stove into the wall. I checked to make sure I was right in thinking that our pillows were made of single slabs of foam. I walked the length of the house again and again, taking the measure of its sturdiness. And still, I could see holes into it.

When I sat down to dinner that night everything appeared to go on as usual, but I perceived a world tilted at a precarious angle. My parents didn't even suspect how much they didn't know. The thought made me tremble. My fears had an unfamiliar strength. I ate huge mouthfuls of food so that I wouldn't be able to talk. I kept my eyes moving from my mother's face to my father's to my plate. If they never settled on one thing, perhaps they wouldn't have time to give me away.

My father was telling us about a small pile of cicada wings he had found in the backyard, describing their delicacy and the leaf-like veining that ran through them. It surprised me that he spoke about them as if he'd found a treasure. I was waiting for the moment when my mother would leave the room saying she wasn't going to listen to him talk about those horrible things. But she never did. She said "oh yeah?" and "how do you like that" a few times as he recounted the cicada's strange life cycle, but that was all. Mostly she watched him

while he spoke and the more animated he became, the more amused and contented she looked. That surprised me too.

"So, these cicadas will be underground for seventeen years now," my father said with a flourish. "Isn't it amazing?"

I nodded my head. I didn't tell him I already knew that or that I knew everything else he had just told us about the insects. I kept chewing.

"So that means, honey, that you'll be twenty-nine the next time they come up," he said leaning toward me. He was watching me eat. "Twenty-nine. They'll still be juveniles after seventeen years, and you'll be twenty-nine."

I nodded my head again, and turned back to my food. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him look at my mother and shrug.

"Pretty hard to imagine," he said, and I had managed to mumble "yeah" between mouthfuls. But it wasn't at all hard for me to imagine it now. I just didn't want to. I preferred trying to imagine the next day when, with any luck, I wouldn't know too much more, about anything, than I knew at that moment.

Wayne Koestenbaum

A History of Private Life

First came the age of gold, then silver, steel,
papier-mâché—and now glass: the transparent

briefcase I bought in Rome so you can see
the secret contents (book, pen, fruit) I lug

up opaque streets. These are not privacies.
One street abuts another; reticence

confirms them as hushed individuals.
My neighbor pronounces “opaque” *o-pack*.

As in: “Oh, pack your bags and go!” His wife,
Greek, wears tight jeans that suggest the imprint,

the fossil-mark, of her privacy. I shield
my eyes, not wishing rudely to behold

her “v,” though she has placed it on display.
My house sits next to the “o-pack” man’s own:

books huddled on his refrigerator,
as if history needed keeping cold.

The four swans afloat (sharing a private
joke) on Hadrian’s Villa’s pond do not

protect or protract mourning. They are true.
Friends fresh from a Bombay ashram fed them seed.

Less true are palace fronts no longer whole.
 Sky space between cracked pillars assembles

a tremulous, flesh-coral sense of night.
 The stone of any saint's basilica,

beheld through dreaming eyes, becomes the man's
 cracked ribcage fossilized so I can run

a curious thumb along his frame and pluck
 bone souvenirs—as if martyrdom weren't

indigenous to the one who suffers,
 but a scent or quality one can steal.

I lean on irony to see. Five men
 spent August painting my house (front and back)

yolk-yellow. Gentle private men, they slashed
 my tree's branch because it leaned on the house

and stood in their way. I watched the slashing
 silently. A racing panic forbids

completion of this line: the painters stare
 in as I type these words . . . Spenser's Una

peered into the glass and saw another
 rhyme's thorns prick her. She knew it was August

thirty-first, as blossoms out my window
 tremble with opinions, advice from wind,

horn-blasts, late loud parties—these ambient
 disturbances the tree absorbs through sap

while living out its pageant of cell loss
 and gain, its didactic dead leaf carpet

telling the children (this or any year)
who gather beneath, that they will recall

this leaden sky as argent. I do not
own land but am landlord of a sadness,

not sculpted like the trim *jardin anglais*
peering down from the tag sale print I've placed,

tilted, above a mirror, so staring
at myself I peripherally see

gardens dragged by gravity, though I trust
mechanical laws keep pictures in their frames,

against the walls they were meant to uphold.
It's not a pure pleasure to be french-kissed—

sometimes the lover's tongue assaults the mouth's
sense of tabernacle, though a rushing

anticipation—immanence like skirts—
makes the locked jaw lax and willing. Autumn

demands to exist (we comply): mythic
events occur in time not wrenched by watch

but in a hazed forgetfulness, as when
I use a stolen guest towel to dry

my body and detect no scent of theft,
or Warsaw appears through nocturnal mist

as home to the man (hewn glance!) I pursue
down love-cobbled alleys, meanwhile thinking

“Communist life is not as bad as one
has heard.” Quest, knight, lady, beast: these lies make

up anatomy. One struggles to paint
railings, pediments, and September comes

with my house's bulk looming unpainted
against mute neighbor homes, with aged or young

residents—or no residents at all.
Some boats, bound by rope, rest against the dock,

and others float in lichen's privacy,
though I'm not sure what privacy means:

a tremor, it starts when the painters leave,
then spreads up the spine, bringing glimpses

of September twenty-third and its slant
velvety relation to the ideal.

My house, unpainted, becomes archaic,
for the average American bedroom

(middle-class) contains a microcosm
of a French eighteenth-century pleasure

palace complete with folly, vista, pond,
and the possibility of drowning.

Two Poems by Barbara Wuest

The Joyful Mysteries (I)

The way we made sure the entire tree glowed with only blue lights you'd think we were calculating the atmosphere. This was our time to be sad, though we never said as much. Something turned in the evening every time. And before either of us could think about changing its tone, the room was engulfed where we sat dressed up and saying so little the snow could nearly be heard. Then the furnace kicked on and we both rose at once to see the white weather gathering over steps we would soon walk down to get away. From what we weren't sure. The vagueness of loss, a death too cumbersome for his wife, more puzzling than his last daughter could carry past a sentence or two. "The year has been good," my mother said. "Unplug the tree and let's go." Then we did just that before we had time to say more about love than we can.

The Joyful Mysteries (III)

Strolling around the Lake in the snowy air, Bozie, Phillip and I talked about their mother and mine. How they seemed, through the evening, to be glad for things anyway. We spoke like the parents we would never become, the three who'd remain ones given birth to. The way it falls out alarms all of us sometimes. And then tonight, kicking snow gently, we move from one globe lamp to the next without plans. Having what we're after in time not yet lived, this is what goes: Nothing to give back but selves we will never know as well as do the two women inside chatting by the tree. One of us wonders out loud why the water is still not stopped by the mounting cold. "And I am surprised the whole town stays in," another of us says, "while we cheer on winter by ourselves." "Yes," says the third, "I'm surprised."

Three Poems by Amy Gerstler

A Father at His Son's Baptism

Cutlet carved from our larger carcasses:
thus were you made—from spit and a hug.
The scratchy stuff you're lying on is wool.
You recognize the pressure of your mother's hand.
That white moon with a bluish cast is a priest's face,
frowning over a water bowl. Whatever befalls you now,
you've been blessed, in a most picturesque
and ineffective ceremony, dating from the Middle Ages.
Outdoors, the church lawn radiates a lethal green.
A gas truck thunders down the street.
Why, at emotional moments, do the placid trees
and landscape look overexposed, almost ready
to bleach away, and reveal the workings
of "the Real" machine underneath?
All bundled up on such a hot day:
whose whelp, pray tell, or mutton chop are you?
—tail-less, your cloudy gaze a vague accusation,
not of the sins of my history, but ignorance
to come, future cruelty. You're getting red
in the face, blotchy, ready to wail. Good.
From now on protest and remember everything.
Your cries assail even the indigent dead,
buried in charity plots right outside,
slowly they're releasing their heat, while you,
born out of the blue into a wheezing spring,
watch a chaotic mosaic assemble itself.
You tune up. My love for you is half adrenaline,
half gibberish. More Latin and the priest
splatters you. He's got one good eye,
and a black patch, like a pirate.

Now, smiling as if he knows something I don't,
he hands you to me. If I drop you, loudmouth,
will you bounce or fly? You were chalky
and bloody at first, in the doctor's grip,
looking skinned and inside-out.

Boyhood, a dangling carrot. I stare at you
and experience the embarrassment of riches. I
need to loosen my tie or I'll faint.
Outside a rake scrapes, sprinklers hiss.
It might be best to set you down
in one of these squares of light on the floor,
striped by venetian blinds, and leave you safe
in that bright cage. I could go have coffee,
and come back when we can carry on
a conversation. Men and women are afraid
of each other. It's true. Whisper
and drool of my flesh, I'm terrified of you.

Early Hour

for Benjamin Weissman

The window's wide open.
The crowns of a blue-leafed
and a green-leafed tree
are visible outdoors, in front
of a ridge of washed-out mountains.
Propped up on one elbow,
leaning his cheek on his hand,
he looks at her as she sleeps,
facing away from him. She lies
with her head on her crooked arm.
A blue blanket seeps from between
her knees. Their bed fills the room,
looking less like a bed
than a small stage.
The thin mattress doesn't seem
to rest on anything.
The third figure on the bed's
a brown dog, his tame face
resting on crossed paws.
He's also fast asleep.
Both humans are naked.
The man's skin is so much darker
than the woman's, he seems
to belong to a different race.
The sight of her white form
won't leave him in peace.
When he shuts his eyes,
her aura flares on his retinas:
a fuzzy brightness he finds
himself tender custodian of.
If it were to vanish,
he'd feel like a blind man,
chasing the irreplaceable.

He thinks he would disappear.
As it is, his attentions
have little to lean on.

Still, they wind themselves
around the rickety trellis
of her skeleton. One must
restrain one's love.
One mustn't act as though
waking up in the morning
is some kind of breakthrough,
a marvelous accomplishment,
an occasion for cake
and champagne, though in fact,
it is. Among all our joys,
he thinks, it is the setting
of that last persistent star,
right before morning,
that stands out.

The Ice Age

A million years ago the earth grew cold. Iowa was covered by twenty-five hundred feet of ice. No one knows why the glaciers formed and spread, or why they eventually retreated.

I blinked and you were gone.

As a boy, he loved the idea of the ice age. Lumbering woolly mammoths and giant sloths. Outside, a vast white edict erasing the landscape. Inside his head cave paintings of bison leapt in the firelight, their horns spiraling upward, the tips smoking.

Men on skis came to dig you out. Though they worked all night, they were too late.

Waking every day the frost reasserts itself. Its relentlessness a tedium, a closure. The earth must have looked more familiar when all was water. We don't recognize ourselves amidst this overwhelming winter: static that censors newscasts, cold that burns, incessant dripping as icicles perfect themselves. The night skies are a riot of Chinese silk: bolts of crimson and shadow-blue. The radio crackles faintly.

Medical refuse litters the beaches, spews into the water from a backed up sewer under the pier. Bacteria cavort in the seawater. The weather's gone haywire all over the globe. The more sensitive you are the earlier you'll die. Just hold your breath a little longer, dear.

Once you start this medication, you can't stop. Your life changes. You decide, based on a dearth of information, which force you want to submit to: *nature*, now less maternal than ever, or her idiot son — *modern medicine*. You make an effort to find some grand design in this blindness. If you can't see well enough anymore to edit your film, perhaps you can still do the music. You set an example.

Lemme outa here.

As a boy, before his mother found out and made him stop, he'd bury the frozen birds he found on the porch after big storms by warming the earth first with his father's blowtorch.

Being human, we can't help attempting to arrange events into patterns — the way a sick man sees faces in the stains on his bedroom ceiling. He names them. Months later, they all converse.

The men in the ice-covered radio station play cards and drink bourbon.

What defense can one mount against an avalanche?

Spotless beakers, pipettes, rows of small cages. Welcome to the lab. Here's the chamber where we run preliminary screenings. Better don these gloves. Why not use two pair, like me? The new man on the night shift nods off over his work, with the radio playing. Its tinned strands of music enter his dream disguised as a dead friend's hair. He had short, coarse hair, like a terrier, pleasantly stiff to the touch. The lab is brightly lit to ward off the backwash of night. Under the table the research assistant's feet twitch spasmodically in his sleep.

A series of blurry, black and white newsreels flickers on screen. Martian canals overflow their banks. A lake in Africa exhales a cloud of poison gas, killing thousands of villagers on its shores. Venice sinks. Anchorage, Alaska is leveled by earthquakes. Pompeii is breaded and fried by its volcano. The swamp swallows another sand bar, then coughs up a tiny island. Sub-zero temperatures paralyze Acapulco. *There have been several ice ages* a female narrator intones. *The most recent lasted 90,000 years.* A timer goes off and the lab assistant jerks awake. In about the time it takes to drink a glass of water, he remembers where he is.

"This is probably the last time I will write to you . . ."

The rocks applaud. Summers turn short and cool. The world remakes itself without us now.

Portfolio

Untitled

Martin Kippenberger

HÔTEL METROPOLE & SUISSE

CASSANI-DANIOTH FRÈRES, Dir.

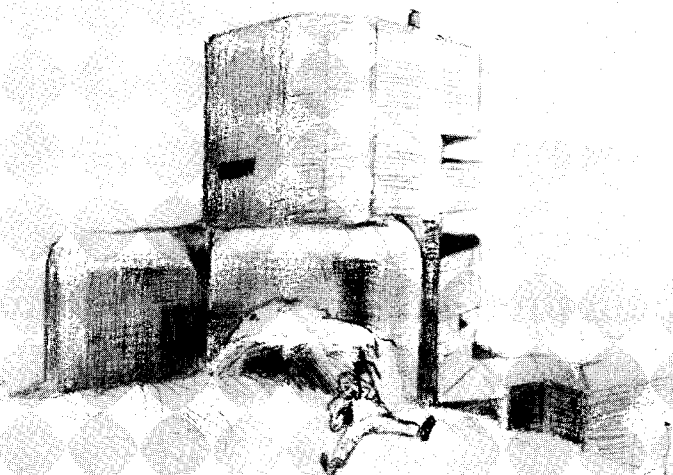
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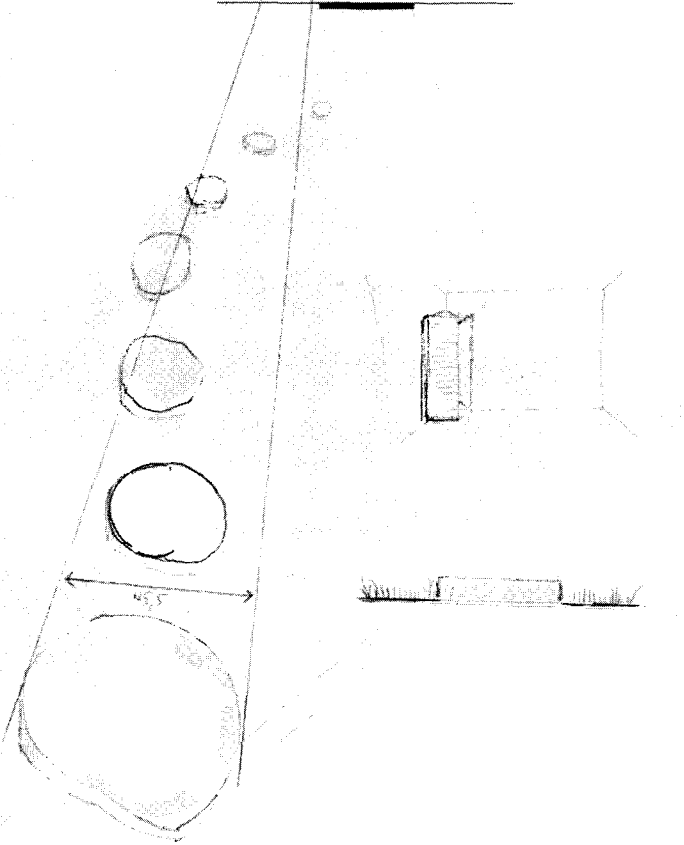
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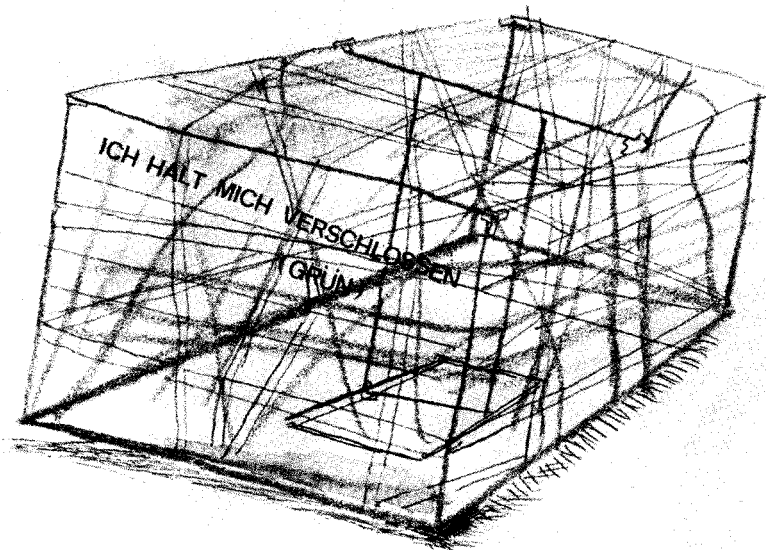
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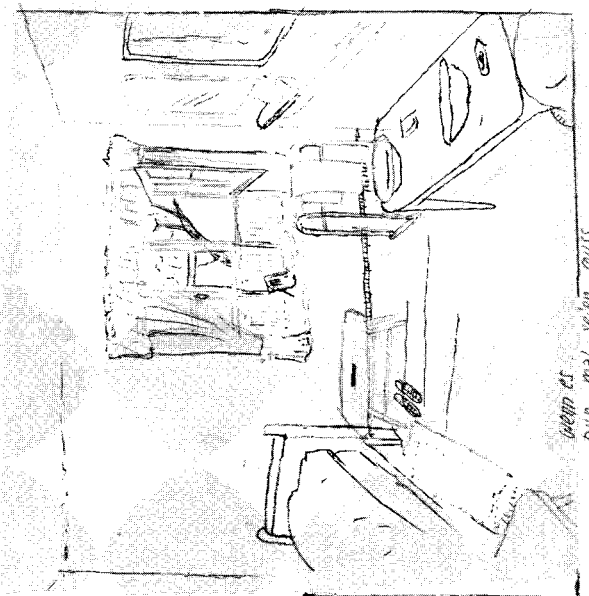
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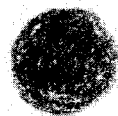
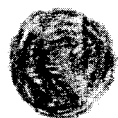
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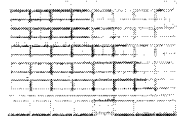


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penneth."

"ale ni bo dices u naa' bawhne," x'elil
 x'elil Kaurha. "Tah klange' nas bawhne veni."
 "Wepawhne," x'elil Tawpoh. "U' wa'
 na' pawhne bawhne na' pawhne u'."

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The Art of Fiction CXII

Josef Skvorecky

A native of Nachod, a small town on the northeastern border of Bohemia—the westernmost part of Czechoslovakia—Josef Skvorecky has experienced virtually every major political system of twentieth century Europe: liberal democracy under the nation's first and second presidents, Tomas Masaryk and Eduard Benes, until the Munich Pact of 1938; Nazism from 1939 until the Potsdam Conference of 1945; "uneasy" democratic socialism until the Communist coup d'état of 1948; Stalinism until 1960; the liberalization of Communism until 1967, culminating in Alexander Dubcek's Prague Spring

of 1968, and terminated by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of that year.

The son of a bank clerk and chairman of the local Sokol Gymnastic Association, Skvorecky graduated from the local realgymnasium in 1943, worked for two years in the Messerschmitt munitions factories in Nachod and Nove Mesto under the Totaleinsatz scheme, and was then transferred to the Organization Todt for trench-digging duty, from which he defected. For the last two months of the war he worked in a cotton mill.

He subsequently studied for a year at the Medical Faculty of Charles University in Prague, but transferred to the Philosophical Faculty, graduating in 1949 and receiving a Ph.D. in American philosophy in 1951. After teaching for two years at the Social School for Girls in Horice v Podkrkonosi, Skvorecky was drafted into the Army where he served with the elite tank division stationed in the Mlada military camp near Prague, now the headquarters of the Soviet occupation army.

In 1948, at the invitation of the literary and art critic Jindrich Chalupecky, he became a member of the Prague underground circle of Jiri Kolar, and, as a frequent visitor to meetings of the Prague surrealists at the apartment of the artist Mikulas Medek, he was introduced to the underground litterateurs of the early 1950s.

An aspiring tenor saxophone player, Skvorecky began writing at an early age, but time and again political circumstances thwarted the publication of his works in Czechoslovakia. His first novel offered for publication, *The End of the Nylon Age*, was banned by the censors before publication in 1956. His second novel, *The Cowards*, which he had written ten years earlier, was published in 1958, but became the pretext for a cultural purge by Stalinist members of the Communist Party. As a result, Skvorecky lost his job as editor of the magazine *World Literature*, and was unable to publish until five years later, when the novella, *The Legend of Emöke* (1963), appeared. Though criticized by the Party, *Emöke* became one of the major publishing successes of the mid-sixties in Czechoslovakia. Skvorecky was still closely watched, and yet another novel,

Miss Silver's Past, was banned before its publication in 1967, only appearing afterwards under Dubcek in 1968. Not until 1967 was Skvorecky made a member of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, and then only because of his position as Chairman of the Translators' Section.

With the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Skvorecky and his wife Zdena, a singer, actress and novelist (Summer in Prague), left for Canada, where he now teaches film and American literature at the University of Toronto. His works published in Canada include two books continuing the adventures begun by Danny Smiricky in The Cowards—The Swell Season (1974) and The Engineer of Human Souls, which won the Canadian Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1984. He is also the author of a novel about army life, The Tank Corps (1971), a series of detective novels, including The Mournful Demeanor of Lieutenant Boruvka (1966) and The End of Lieutenant Boruvka (1975), short stories, screenplays, essays on the Czech cinema, and translations from English into Czech of Ray Bradbury, Raymond Chandler, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and Henry James. In 1971 he and his wife founded Sixty-Eight Publishers in Toronto, now the most important Czech-language publishing house in the world. Since then they have published more than 150 books, among them new works by leading poets, playwrights and novelists such as Milan Kundera, Vaclav Havel, and Ludvik Vaculik.

Skvorecky's most recently published work in English is Dvorak in Love (1987). His The Miracle Game, which was written in 1972, is to be published in early 1990. He is currently at work on The Bride from Texas, a novel about the role of Czech-Americans in the Civil War, "whose life stories," he admits, "may not be important historically, but they make for good fiction."

A natural storyteller who brings a special Old World sensibility to life in the New World, Skvorecky has become a satirist by circumstance, a dissident out of necessity, and has emerged as one of the most important voices in contemporary world literature. His work is distinguished by its far-reaching histori-

cal consciousness and sense of social engagement, an irrepressible wit and a long-standing concern with human rights.

In 1980 Skvorecky was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and on presenting him to the jury, Arnost Lustig, a fellow Czech emigré author, wrote: "In a country that has not had any democracy for over forty years now, books like those of Josef Skvorecky have become forbidden fruit on the one hand, and a hope for dignity and freedom on the other. Taken together, his works constitute a highly artistic presentation of recent Czech history as the common intelligent people saw it and felt it."

A man of warmth and generosity, Skvorecky chooses his words carefully, speaking in a low, gravelly voice, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. Like many Czechs, he has a fondness for beer, which we drank to the strains of contemporary Czech jazz, while conducting this interview over two sessions in New York City and Amherst, Massachusetts.

Asked on one occasion about the meaning of one of his works, Skvorecky replied in the words of Veronika, the sad heroine of The Engineer of Human Souls: "Let's leave it to the horses to figure out. They have bigger heads."

INTERVIEWER

How old were you when you first tried your hand at fiction?

JOSEF SKVORECKY

When I was a boy, I was something of a sportsman. I played soccer, and I skied, but then I fell ill with pneumonia, which in those days was a serious disease. I almost died of it, and I was afterwards forbidden to play sports. So I became a sheltered child, and got interested in writing. I was especially interested in an American writer by the name of James Oliver Curwood who wrote romances. Towards the end of his life he started a trilogy about trappers, but he died before finishing it. He was very popular in Czechoslovakia, and I decided to finish the trilogy for him. I wrote *The Mysterious Cave* as the third volume of his trilogy when I was about nine.

INTERVIEWER

What was the first novel you completed?

SKVORECKY

It was a story about student life I wrote right after my matriculation in the *gymnasium*—about an affair I had with a schoolgirl. My second unpublished novel was *An Inferiority Complex*, again a love story based on real experiences, which in a way prefigures *The Cowards*. My first *real* novel was *The End of the Nylon Age*, which I began writing in the university. It's about a student who has an affair with a shopgirl, and then an actress, and gets involved in smuggling. It was important for me as a writer, because I found I was good at lyrical description—which is easy if you're at all talented—but writing dialogue was something else. Remember, my formative years were spent under the Nazis, when access to good literature was restricted. Many books were simply banned.

INTERVIEWER

What books did you have access to?

SKVORECKY

The Czech classics, which one had to read, and therefore hated. Czech fiction didn't really come of age until the 1930s; poetry had been the primary literary form until then. The first genuinely good Czech fiction writer was Jaroslav Hasek, a genius who didn't have any schooling, but wrote *The Good Soldier Schweik* in the early 1920s. It was his one great novel; its greatness is not as a novel, but as an observation of life in a very original, personal and caustic style. Hasek was atypical. After Hasek come Vladislav Vancura, a highly sophisticated stylist, Karel Capek, a very good short-story writer who gained renown because of his plays, and Polacek, a Jewish-Czech writer who has never been translated into English and whom I really love—a master of the language.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have any other literary influences?

SKVORECKY

Well, this shopgirl I was in love with was a real influence because she was very talkative, and she talked in scenes—literally using “scenic method.” She couldn’t tell a story in any other way: “And then I said to him . . . and he said to me. . . .” And she also used contractions which I tried to imitate in my novel. One of the scenes from *The Nylon Age*, “A Babylonian Story,” is just such an experiment in dialogue. But the novel itself is probably unreadable.

INTERVIEWER

Why was writing dialogue so difficult for you?

SKVORECKY

There’s this tradition in Czech literature that books are sacred, and therefore the language used in writing books is very formal—without contractions, distortions, or slang. The Czech expression for correct language is *spisovna cestina*, which means bookish Czech, and it’s not a derogatory term. Most of the Czech books I was able to read were in this formal manner, and I was brought up thinking that’s how books were written.

INTERVIEWER

What changed your perception?

SKVORECKY

Hemingway. I suddenly saw that you could write dialogue as people spoke it. But I didn’t read Hemingway until the end of the war in an English-language Swedish edition of *A Farewell to Arms*. And then I read everything. It opened my eyes. I realized that you could write dialogue that need not be informational; it simply *was*.

INTERVIEWER

How were you first introduced to American culture in Czechoslovakia?

SKVORECKY

Seeing Judy Garland's movies. I saw *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* with Mickey Rooney, in which Judy sang "Stormy Weather." I was determined to write her a letter, so I had to learn English. The two languages everyone had to learn in Czechoslovakia were German and French, but instead of studying French, I studied English. I wrote Judy Garland that letter, but I never heard back from her.

INTERVIEWER

What was the first work you read in English?

SKVORECKY

My English teacher loaned me some of her books, and the first was Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. After that came Shaw, Wilde and Galsworthy; plays are easy to understand because of their relatively simple sentence structure. I also started listening to the BBC, which was jammed except for the English news; the announcer enunciated slowly, clearly, and with precise pronunciation, which was easy to follow.

INTERVIEWER

The period of the Soviet occupation of Prague beginning in May 1945 is also the time frame of your novel, *The Cowards*. How did you feel about the Communists moving in after six years of Nazi rule?

SKVORECKY

I was very concerned. My father was a committed Democrat who mistrusted both the Nazis and the Communists, and was arrested by both. I grew up believing that the Communists were not much better than the Nazis. I had an aunt who was Jewish, and also a Communist. "You know," my father used to say, "she's really very nice, but she's a Bolshevik." She was very pretty, had red nails, smoked cigarettes from a long holder, and wore pants, which in those days was considered very radical.

She disappeared in a Soviet labor camp, so when the war was over, I felt that the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia was not much better—and possibly just as bad—as Nazi rule.

INTERVIEWER

Was there a widespread feeling that Czechoslovakia had been sold out by the West at Yalta?

SKVORECKY

Yes. It would have been perfectly easy for the Americans to take Prague, establish their presence, and then withdraw. But then the Americans would have been regarded by the Soviets—and the rest of the world—as Czech liberators, and the Soviets didn't want that. And nobody wanted another war.

INTERVIEWER

When the Communists assumed power in 1948, the official aesthetic became socialist realism, though as Milan Kundera pointed out, it was impossible to be realistic.

SKVORECKY

That's why I never even thought of submitting *The Cowards* for publication then. I always compared so-called socialist realism with the American western, because they are the same types of formulaic fiction. The original western, for example, features a ranch, a band of desperadoes stealing cattle from it, a local sheriff who's an incompetent, and a stranger who appears out of nowhere. The stranger is fed up with the desperadoes, and decides to take care of them himself, which he does. He also winds up marrying the daughter of the ranch owner, and off they go together into the sunset. Compare that to the socialist realist novel: here there's a collective farm, a band of saboteurs or lazy workers slowing down production, local authorities who are incompetents, and a Party Setetzty from the district capital who appears out of nowhere. He exposes the saboteurs and saves the farm. Then he marries the local school teacher, and off they go together for someplace else. It's

the same formula, and I even tried my hand at it when I was around fifteen.

INTERVIEWER

What impelled you to do so?

SKVORECKY

My sister Anna had an admirer who worked for a penny-dreadful weekly, *Rodokaps/Pocketnovels*, which published westerns. Because he spent so much time hanging around my sister, he sorely needed someone to write up some stories for him. When he heard of my literary aspirations, he gave me some synopses, which I embellished, he reworked, and then we split the profits fifty-fifty. When socialist realism later came along, I realized it was basically the same thing. I never took it seriously and it's never really been defined. To write truthfully and realistically, while never forgetting the bright future when it doesn't exist, what does that mean? It's a propagandist formula.

INTERVIEWER

You've described the technique of *The Cowards* as "magic realism," but clearly you have something else in mind than the magic realism, say, of Gabriel García Márquez?

SKVORECKY

The end of the war was my inspiration for *The Cowards*, which takes place from May 4 to May 11, 1945. You see, the last days of the war in Kostelec—which probably saw some of the last fighting of the war in Europe—were really very exciting. It was the first time I experienced real danger, and I wanted to recreate that period of my life and make it, simply, magical. In Márquez, magic realism means combining the real and the surreal, which is no longer traditional realism. But the term was coined long before Márquez in Czech literary theory by the poet Josef Hora, who suggested that prose should be made as magical as poetry through the use of language and

its association; so that, in Hemingway's terms, it would be truer than truth. That's what I aimed to do in *The Cowards*, which I began in the fall of 1948, and finished in the summer of 1949.

INTERVIEWER

Would you consider yourself a political writer, or a writer who's become political by force of circumstance?

SKVORECKY

If you live in a country where politics are oppressive and you write — or try to write — you can't avoid being a political writer. I enjoy writing about other things, but to write a novel about Bohemia in the past forty years and avoid politics entirely would be to write some sort of romantic idyll that never existed. I consider myself a realistic writer; it's unfortunate that one becomes a political writer out of necessity.

INTERVIEWER

Aside from the implications of your writing, then, what were your political commitments?

SKVORECKY

I really wasn't involved politically, and I don't see *The Cowards* as a political novel. It certainly wasn't intended as such, though it's about a historical event. I was interested, simply, in how things were, and in capturing those events faithfully on paper. The main criticism was that it wasn't political enough, that when everyone was supposed to be fighting the Nazis, the characters in my novel were interested in jazz and girls. That was considered reactionary. So the novel was attacked officially on the grounds that it distorted reality.

INTERVIEWER

But there are parts of *The Engineer of Human Souls* that depict overtly political acts—for example, the attempt at anti-Nazi sabotage in the Messerschmitt aircraft factory.

SKVORECKY

Of course, because that was true, too. But Americans don't realize that Nazi rule between 1939 and 1945 differed from one country to another. In Bohemia it happened to have been relatively mild. Bohemia was a heavily industrial area with major armament factories. The Nazis needed the Czech working class to maintain production of the Skoda three-purpose guns, the Panzerjager armored attack vehicles, and other fruits of Czech technical inventiveness. Therefore, persecution in Bohemia was not as arbitrary as it was in Poland, an agricultural country with no industry to speak of. Being in Central Europe, Bohemia was also far from the front, so life had the appearance of being more or less normal.

INTERVIEWER

That is, if you weren't Jewish.

SKVORECKY

Of course, because Jews were transported. Many Czechs were arrested, too, and when SS *Obergruppenfuhrer* Reinhard Heydrich, appointed protector of Bohemia and Moravia in 1941, was assassinated by Czech paras from England in May 1942, Hitler wanted to shoot every tenth Czech. Five thousand were executed in three weeks. The villages of Lidice and Lezaky were obliterated. While *The Cowards* was not intended to be an anti-Nazi tract, it was meant to be a realistic novel. So that portrayal did include anti-Nazi activities.

INTERVIEWER

How did you end up in the tank corps?

SKVORECKY

The army was seeking political information about various people, including my father. It so happened that my father's barber had joined the Party out of fear, and when questioned about my father, praised him greatly as a progressive, which

landed me in the elite tank corps, which I've described in a novel by that name, not yet translated into English.

INTERVIEWER

What was army life like?

SKVORECKY

The Czech army was slavishly modeled on the Soviet army. First-year soldiers were not allowed to leave the barracks at all. That may make sense in Russia, where most of the army bases are in the middle of nowhere, but I was stationed in the Mlada military camp, about twenty miles east of Prague. We weren't permitted to leave that camp for a whole year, which made it more like jail, and also bored us to death.

INTERVIEWER

Were you able to do any writing?

SKVORECKY

I wrote several novellas, one of which was called *The Viewer in the February Night*, about the Communist takeover.

INTERVIEWER

What did you do on your release from the army?

SKVORECKY

I got a job in Prague at the state publishing house where I worked in the American literature department, specializing in fiction.

INTERVIEWER

What did that work entail?

SKVORECKY

I was a junior editor and I had to check punctuation and grammar, edit translations, and read new American and English works to recommend for translation.

INTERVIEWER

So you were working in a Czech publishing house without being able to get published yourself in Czechoslovakia. Did any of your work appear as *samizdat*?

SKVORECKY

No, there wasn't any *samizdat* in Stalinist times. I was part of an underground literary circle, though, presided over by the poet and artist Jiri Kolar, which included the writer Bohumil Hrabal, the art historian Vera Linhartova, the poet and translator Jan Vladislav, and the composer Jan Rychlik, among others. We'd discuss art, politics, literature, and read from works in progress we knew wouldn't be able to be published given the current political situation. At one of Kolar's meetings, Hrabal read the first version of the story which was the basis of the film *Closely Watched Trains*.

INTERVIEWER

What effect did Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 and the call for de-Stalinization have on the cultural climate of Czechoslovakia?

SKVORECKY

In 1957, during the first rapprochement after Stalin's death, we started publishing *World Literature*, following the lead of the new Soviet journal, *Inostrannaya literatura*, or "Foreign Literature." By the standards of the day, *World Literature* was really very radical. We published the first Faulkner, Hemingway, Waugh, and Kafka. Kafka had not been particularly lucky in terms of the publication of his works in his native country. His first novel translated into Czech was *The Castle*, but it appeared at the time of the Munich crisis in 1939, and simply disappeared. To the Communists, Kafka was considered a decadent writer, so he wasn't published again in Czechoslovakia until we brought out his last, unfinished story, "The Burrow." That beautiful drawing of Kafka by the Czech painter, Frantisek Tichy, was commissioned by *World Literature*,

and we also published an essay on Kafka by Pavel Eisner. Eisner's essay had been translated in Italy and published in a Communist Party magazine labelled the first Marxist study of Kafka, which was very funny, because Eisner was an old Prague Jewish gentleman who had very little to do with Marxism whatsoever.

INTERVIEWER

How did you get away with publishing Waugh, a reactionary writer by almost any standards?

SKVORECKY

I thought Waugh was the best English writer after the Second World War. He's a brilliant technician, and I think his war trilogy, *Men at Arms*, *Officers and Gentlemen* and *The End of the Battle*, is the best work on the war in Europe. Well, I realized that it would be difficult to recommend Waugh for translation, but I found a review in a Polish-Marxist journal that hailed *The Loved One* as a satire of American capitalist exploitation, which helped convince my editor-in-chief that we should print it. So we had the novel translated by a friend of mine who was a fairly clumsy translator. In this translation I came across the expression "nutburger." Now, I had heard of hamburgers and cheeseburgers, but nutburgers? So I wrote to Waugh asking him about it, and he sent back a very funny, typically Waughian letter claiming that a nutburger was a common capitalist concoction whereby the capitalists, pretending that they were giving meat to the working class, were in reality giving them nothing more than nuts!

INTERVIEWER

The publishing situation began to change as a result of the thaw, didn't it?

SKVORECKY

Now, even Umberto Eco is published, though the first paragraph of *The Name of the Rose* refers to the Soviet invasion of Prague. Of course, the Czech edition omitted the reference,

but at least the rest of the book was published. When Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* appeared, many Czechs who read it thought: "My God, this is about the Communist Party!" Which makes sense, because when the Communist Party comes to power, it acts a lot like the Mafia: if you are a loyal member in good standing, everything is yours. You're protected, even if you commit a crime. *The Godfather* was translated, printed and bound. Then the most Stalinist member of the Presidium of the Party read it, and tried to block its publication. But half a million copies were already in print. So instead, the Party banned all reviews, prevented booksellers from displaying it, and there was absolutely no publicity. And *The Godfather* sold very well.

INTERVIEWER

The Israeli novelist, Amos Oz, once said that translating Hebrew into English is like making love to a woman through a blanket. Is much lost, when translating Czech into English and English into Czech?

SKVORECKY

I think almost any language can be translated into any other, though in North America, because of an old tradition of Czech immigration, there exists a unique English-Czech dialect, which can be very funny, because the English words undergo all the linguistic rules of Czech grammar; and that's impossible to translate into English. On the other hand, the problem with rendering English into Czech is not so much the translation, as what is deemed unfit for translation. My brother-in-law, a former political prisoner, read *The Godfather* first in Czech, and then in English when he came to Canada, and discovered some very revealing revisions. There's a scene in *The Godfather*, for example, when Don Corleone calls a meeting of the five underworld families to propose a peace. One of the Mafiosi says: "If Corleone has all the judges in New York, then he must share them or let us others use them. Certainly he can present a bill for such services, we're not communists, after all." But in the Czech translation, the sentence ends: "not even

a chicken scrapes the ground for nothing after all," which is an old Czech proverb, but not quite the same in English. In Hemingway's novel, *To Have and Have Not*, and in Ginsberg's "Howl," which we also published, references to "Trotskyites" were changed to "revolutionaries." The smuggler's boat *Aurora* in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes novel *The Sign of Four* became the *Naiad* in the Czech translation because *Aurora*, of course, had been the battleship which started the Russian revolution by shelling the Winter Palace in Petrograd.

INTERVIEWER

When did the ideological climate warm up for native Czech writers?

SKVORECKY

In the late 1950s. Because I was known to Ladislav Fikar, director of the Writers' Union Publishing House, the most important publisher of contemporary Czech literature, I was asked to submit some work for publication. I knew that *The Cowards* was still too hot, so I offered *The End of the Nylon Age*, and it was accepted in 1956. In the fifties, if an editor considered a manuscript politically "safe," it could be set in type, and then page proofs would be sent to the censor. If, on the other hand, a manuscript was thought "controversial," it was sent to the censor before being set in type.

INTERVIEWER

In other words, the editor acts as a pre-censor?

SKVORECKY

Exactly. Theoretically, there was no censorship in Czechoslovakia, but a "Bureau of Press Supervision," which supposedly had no right to ban anything. It could only recommend, or withhold a recommendation, for publication. If an editor was courageous, he could still publish a manuscript not recommended for publication by the Bureau of Press Supervision, but no editor would be foolish enough to do that. So the manuscript of *The End of the Nylon Age* was printed, sent to

the censor, and I was asked to go before the Bureau. One of the censors was a young woman around thirty who said to me: "You know, comrade, we cannot recommend this for publication, because it is pornography." To which I replied: "There's absolutely nothing pornographic in it. If there is, show me." But she stammered and said: "I can't read this aloud, I would blush," and she wouldn't read from the passage before her. Finally, the other censor—an older man—read it and came across what she regarded as pornographic, which was the word "bosom." That infuriated me. "If you want me to replace it with a folksier expression," I said, "I can do that, too." Well, she didn't. Instead, she threw me out of her office, and that was the end of *The End of the Nylon Age*. It was finally published in Czechoslovakia in 1967. I even received a prize for it from the Writers' Union.

INTERVIEWER

How did *The Cowards* finally get published?

SKVORECKY

Well, Fikar wanted to try that as well, so we sent *The Cowards* to the censor a year later, in 1957, and to our surprise, they did not object at all. I cut this version from 800 down to 500 pages, and it was published in 1958, the day before Christmas. There was a review of it in the *Writers' Union Weekly*, but since it was a first novel, and I was unknown as a published author, *The Cowards* didn't sell many copies initially. It also had a protective blurb on the dustjacket that described it as "a caustic satire on the cowardice of the bourgeoisie." Then in January, 1959, an attack on *The Cowards* appeared in the trade union daily which disparaged it as a defamation of the revolution. Every day thereafter came another attack—in newspapers, magazines, and journals—and they all sounded suspiciously alike. At the time, the Stalinist section of the Party was fighting a battle of retreat, while the Liberal faction was growing stronger. The Stalinists needed an example to highlight the dangers of relaxing censorship, and *The Cowards* was it. I was told that originally they had selected

a novel by Karel Ptáček, *The Town on the Border*—which really *was* politically controversial—as their example, but Ptáček was already a national prizewinner for his first novel, and moreover was a party member. I wasn't, so *The Cowards* was chosen, instead.

INTERVIEWER

How did the Stalinist critique of *The Cowards* affect its success?

SKVORECKY

When the attacks in the press started appearing, that was a signal to booksellers that *The Cowards* was in trouble, and therefore would be in great demand. So they hid their copies. When a Party order was issued demanding that *The Cowards* be confiscated, the police went from store to store looking for it. But smart booksellers told them that *The Cowards* had sold out, and then turned around and sold it to their best customers at a huge profit. One bookseller told a policeman that he had had half a dozen copies, but had sold them to the Prague dairy. You see, in Communist countries there is a tradition that every enterprise rewards its best workers, and the rewards are usually books. So this is a great opportunity for booksellers to unload their unsaleable stock, like the *Selected Works of Lenin*. That's what this one bookseller did with *The Cowards*. Copies were stamped by some party functionary who inscribed them with the names of the industrious workers and presented the books as gifts. The policeman who had visited this bookseller then went to the dairy and found out the names of those who had been given *The Cowards*. He was told by all the prize winners that they had lost their copies.

INTERVIEWER

What were the repercussions of the publication of *The Cowards* for you?

SKVORECKY

I was under a ban, and it looked as though I might be

arrested. I lost my job as an editor of *World Literature*, and the editors responsible for the publication of *The Cowards*, including Fikar, were fired as well. *The Cowards* became the Stalinists' pretext for an extensive cultural purge, and they succeeded, but only for a few years. In the meantime, I soon landed a job in another publishing house. And in terms of the success of *The Cowards*, I couldn't have hoped for better publicity. By 1962-63, I was allowed to publish *The Legend of Emöke*, one of the novellas included in *The Bass Saxophone*.

INTERVIEWER

Having been censured by the Party on the publication of *The Cowards*, what did you work on next?

SKVORECKY

After *The Cowards* affair, Milos Forman came to me with his wife, the beautiful Czech film star, Jana Brejchova, and said that he'd like to write a script from a short story of mine, "Eine kleine Jazzmusik," to make it into his first feature film. I had known Milos since he was a boy. His parents died in a Nazi concentration camp, and Milos was raised by an uncle in Nachod, who was a grocer and a mountain-climbing buddy. He had just graduated from the Film Academy, and we decided to collaborate on the script for *Eine kleine Jazzmusik*, which we presented to the studio. But in those days, there was a body called the Great Dramaturgical Board which consisted of some fifty to seventy people who read all of the scripts presented to the studios. Numerous members of the Board objected to our story, which was about a group of jazz-loving students who try to stage a concert during the Nazi occupation and finally succeed. We had to write and rewrite the script, substituting sabotage for jazz, until after a year it read like any wartime story of sabotage in a German munitions factory. Then the political climate changed, and suddenly these wise-men—who wondered why the film was called *The Band Has Won*, because by now there was no band in it, and why it was subtitled *A Musical Comedy* when it was really a tragedy—allowed us to reinstate what we had deleted. After another

year, we were almost back to where we had been in the beginning, and the project was finally approved. Milos was delighted. I went home that night and on the late-night news heard from some enterprising journalist that a new film, written by Skvorecky and directed by Forman, was in the works. As the devil would have it, the President was listening to the news. He remembered my name from his attack on *The Cowards*—though of course he never read it—and when he heard the news of my film with Milos, he told his secretary the next morning that under no circumstances could a movie be made of *The Cowards*. Of course, he'd got it wrong, but no one had the courage to tell the President that it wasn't *The Cowards* we'd collaborated on. So "*Eine kleine Jazzmusik*" was never made into a film.

INTERVIEWER

Was *The Cowards* ever made into a film?

SKVORECKY

In fact, Milos and I wrote a script for *The Cowards* in 1968. Milos was supposed to go to the States to make his first American movie, and return to Czechoslovakia to shoot *The Cowards* in the summer of 1969. We even found a girl to play Irena, who happened to be the daughter of the real model for Irena. But then the Russians came, and that was the end of *The Cowards*, too.

INTERVIEWER

What were you allowed to publish after *The Legend of Emöke*?

SKVORECKY

A collection of short stories about Jews in my native town, called *The Menorah*; *The Babylonian Story*, a selection of short fiction which included *The Bass Saxophone*; and the Lieutenant Boruvka detective stories.

INTERVIEWER

From *The Bass Saxophone* to *The Swell Season*, to *The Engineer of Human Souls*, and now *Dvorak in Love*, one thing that comes through loud and clear in your work is your love of music.

SKVORECKY

Well, I always wanted to be a jazz musician, and was really never much of one.

INTERVIEWER

How did you first get turned on to jazz?

SKVORECKY

There was a Chick Webb recording called "I've Got a Guy," which featured Ella Fitzgerald. At the time I didn't know it was Ella, because most records then didn't list the names of the singers; the showcase was the band. That was around 1938, when Ella was twenty. "I've Got a Guy" also had a wonderful saxophone chorus, and when I heard it for the first time, I thought I was listening to the music of the heavenly spheres, and I still think that.

INTERVIEWER

But tenor sax, not the bass, was your instrument. When did you first get one?

SKVORECKY

In the *gymnasium* a student who was five years my senior, and the son of the editor of the local paper, started a jazz band. After hearing Chick Webb, I started going to their rehearsals, which featured a brilliant trumpet player who appears as Benno in *The Cowards* and *The Swell Season*. I convinced my father to buy me a tenor sax, and then we started our own band, Red Music, which I describe in *The Bass Saxophone*. I realized quite quickly, however, that I wasn't gifted enough to be a professional musician. Also I had problems

with the breathing, having suffered from childhood pneumonia.

INTERVIEWER

Was the story of *The Bass Saxophone* based on a real incident?

SKVORECKY

There was no bass sax player in town, but a friend of mine was forced to replace a German saxophonist in a German band in Nachod, and he told me how embarrassed he was about the experience. That became the historical basis of the *The Bass Saxophone*. The primary inspiration for the story, however, was literary. Though *The Cowards* was seen, in its day, as a break from socialist realism, in the 1960s, with the introduction of writers such as Kafka, Beckett, Ionesco and Robbe-Grillet, I was viewed as something of a traditional realist, and therefore no longer in vogue. The idea for *The Bass Saxophone* came to me one day when I was ill and at home, and I wrote it, really, as an aesthetic statement, not at all in the vein of realism.

INTERVIEWER

The acceptance of *The Bass Saxophone*, a work about the triumph of art over politics—a risky proposition from the point of view of socialist realism—attests to a more liberal cultural climate. Do you feel now, twenty years after the fact, that the Prague Spring of 1968 and the events leading up to it have been accurately represented in the historical literature?

SKVORECKY

There was certainly a thaw before the Russians came in that August, but I also feel that it's been idealized, and was not nearly as glorious as it now appears. There were still constant battles with the censor. For instance, I wasn't even accepted by the Writers' Union until 1967 because I was considered a suspicious character.

INTERVIEWER

Were you able to attend the Fourth Writers' Congress in 1967?

SKVORECKY

Yes, but only as a representative of the Translators' Section, not of the Writers' Union. When I was elected Chairman of the Translators' Section in 1967, I automatically became a member of the Writers' Union, entering, so to speak, by the back door. Remember, also, that I really hadn't published very much in Czechoslovakia. When I wrote *Miss Silver's Past* and offered it for publication in 1966, it was first rejected, then accepted by the publishing house of the Youth Union, rejected again when their editor-in-chief was fired, and finally published only under Dubcek in 1969, although a second printing of 80,000 copies was destroyed in 1970. When a chapter of *The Tank Corps* was printed in a literary monthly, appearing, seemingly by coincidence, on Army Day—a Czech holiday—the political commander of the army forbade any Czech magazine from printing any kind of satire on army life in the future. But I wasn't the only one having difficulties. Those involved in the new wave of Czech film had terrible problems.

INTERVIEWER

When did you sense the beginning of the end of the Prague Spring?

SKVORECKY

Very soon, beginning, actually, with the relaxation of censorship. Dubcek announced that though censorship had been removed, judgment should be exercised, and that was simply naïve. Once censorship is abolished, you can't suppress the urge of journalists to write. And a state such as Czechoslovakia just couldn't tolerate that. For example, everyone believed that Jan Masaryk, the son of the first president and chief founder of Czechoslovakia, Tomas Masaryk, had been murdered by the KGB after the Communist *putsch* of February 1948. The

official party line, however, was that it was suicide, though a man who owns a gun, and has access to sleeping pills and poison, doesn't jump out of his second story window if he wants to kill himself. Yet it was taboo to print such a deduction. Then Ivan Svitak, I believe, wrote an article about Masaryk's death alleging that Masaryk was not a victim of suicide, but instead had been murdered by Beria's gorillas. Well, other journalists followed with their own theories, after their own research, and then there was a string of sudden deaths. The secret police couldn't withstand such a challenge to its authority. You cannot have a member of the Warsaw Pact that suddenly becomes freer and more democratic than democratic nations in the West. So I knew that the period of the so-called Prague Spring would end in disaster; it was only a matter of time.

INTERVIEWER

Prague Spring seems to have been largely an intellectual revolt. What role did the workers play in it?

SKVORECKY

It was triggered by writers and intellectuals, but it had mass support in the general populace. Dubcek was genuinely popular, the only Communist leader in Czechoslovakia to be so. Before Dubcek, marching through the city on May Day was mandatory. But in May 1968, it was absolutely spontaneous, and by far the greatest manifestation of support for Dubcek. Revolutions are never started by the masses; they always have an intellectual head, which is not to say that the Czech populace is not an extremely well-educated one. There was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm during the Prague Spring—and I shared that—but I knew it couldn't last.

INTERVIEWER

Do you in any way blame Dubcek for a lack of leadership, or for underestimating the chances of Soviet intervention?

SKVORECKY

He was a very weak leader. Remember Goethe's poem, "The

Sorcerer's Apprentice"? Well, what happened to Goethe's apprentice once he was left to his own devices by the wizard, is what happened to Dubcek. He started a mass movement which he simply could not control.

INTERVIEWER

When did you leave Czechoslovakia?

SKVORECKY

I was in Paris with my wife when the Soviets entered Prague, and when I heard the news I didn't want to return, because I knew this was the end. Zdena was a student at the Academy and wanted to continue her studies. She convinced me to return in October 1968, but after three months, she realized how terrible things were, so we left for Canada, where we've been ever since.

INTERVIEWER

At the Fourth Congress of the Writers' Union, Ludvik Vaculik was quoted as saying: "Freedom exists only in places where one does not need to speak about it," a sentiment echoed in *The Engineer of Human Souls*. How has your new-found freedom in Canada affected your work as a writer?

SKVORECKY

In my eighteen years in Canada, I've written more books than I did as an adult writer in more than twenty years in Czechoslovakia. There's no censorship here, and as a result, you know that if you write something good, there is the opportunity to publish it. In Czechoslovakia, you can write a masterpiece, and there's no guarantee that it will ever be published.

INTERVIEWER

Were the actual conditions under which you wrote in Czechoslovakia inhibiting for a writer? In other words, to paraphrase the theme of the 1986 PEN International Congress, how did the imagination of the State affect your imagination as a writer?

SKVORECKY

Very much. In my first ten years of serious writing, beginning with the end of World War II, I wrote for my desk drawer only, without any hope of being published given the political situation. But when you reach a certain age, you want to see yourself in print; otherwise, it becomes oppressive. You can't continue to write for the desk drawer until you are sixty. Even Kafka saw some of his works in print. But writing remains a potentially dangerous act. When *The Stories of the Tenor Saxophonist*, which I wrote in the 1950s, fell into the wrong hands, I was threatened with exposure. And then you could go to jail for having written something, even if you *didn't* try to publish it. Kolar spent a year in jail precisely because of some poems he wrote, not for publication, but which the police got hold of anyway and considered anti-State. It's much better now, since the death of Stalin, but still the atmosphere is inhibiting.

INTERVIEWER

What are the literary merits of the officially-sanctioned literature?

SKVORECKY

In spite of what one might expect, not all of it is bad; in fact, some of the writers are quite talented. The trouble is they're not writing up to their full potential because they can't write freely; they have to avoid certain themes and subjects which happen to be some of the most important ones of the time. No matter how you look at literature, the fact is that great books are usually focused—in one way or another—on the issues of the day. In the America of the Depression, for example, you had Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, because that's what America—or at least a part of it—was living through. But in Czechoslovakia, which is a police state, everything is under control to a certain extent. So how can you write a great novel if you cannot touch upon the most burning issues of the society of which you are a part? Let's face it, all writers are ambitious and like to see themselves in print, and that leads many

talented writers to compromise in such situations; otherwise they will never be published. Nowadays it's a little easier, because dissident writers can be published abroad, but who knows what may happen next, internally? Writers such as Vaculik, Vaclav Havel and Ivan Klima, among others, have been living under the conditions of a ghetto—of police surveillance and isolation—for years. It's a miracle they're able to produce anything. In the western world, by contrast, all you have to worry about, really, is your talent. And the competition! The freedom here is not a four-letter word; it's real. Because when it doesn't exist, you know it, and I've known it.

INTERVIEWER

In fact, what Milan Kundera called your *magnum opus*, *The Engineer of Human Souls*, was written not in Czechoslovakia, but in Canada, though the narrative constantly shifts from the East to the West, from the old world to the new. How did you conceive of that structure, which was a significant departure for you in terms of technique?

SKVORECKY

I had so much material—really the accumulation of a lifetime—that the problem with *The Engineer* was how to organize it and incorporate it into a traditional novel. I decided instead to try to imitate the way life appears in this chaotic twentieth century where we are bombarded by disparate experiences and impressions. I thought that the structure of the novel should reflect the collage-like nature of our time. The idea really came from our flight from Czechoslovakia. The day in 1969 that Zdena and I left Prague for good was just after the funeral of Jan Palach, the student who immolated himself in protest over the erosion of freedoms in Czechoslovakia. Prague was dreary and gloomy, and there was a foreboding of bad tidings to come. But in less than an hour's flight, we arrived in London's Heathrow airport on a bright, sunny day, where we ran into these happy English tourists apparently returning from their vacation in the Alps. It was an incredible difference of mood, place and character. Because of this disparity, I felt that

the proper form for a modern novel would be to write it in conflicting, collage-like scenes—the “deliberate confusion” of Conrad’s psychological realism—which is what I did. I wrote the episodes separately, and then wove them together to create a sense either of contrast or continuity.

INTERVIEWER

It’s interesting that you describe the composition of *The Engineer* in visual terms, of “collage-like scenes,” while the structure of the novel impressed me as being closer to the musical term of counterpoint.

SKVORECKY

Well, you’re right. That’s really a more accurate description, because the episodes are interwoven as themes.

INTERVIEWER

Had you ever experimented with that technique before?

SKVORECKY

The first book in which I attempted this was *Miracle in Bohemia*, where I introduced an episode at the very beginning and reintroduced a similar one at the very end to bring it full circle.

INTERVIEWER

Isn’t that part of Poe’s dictum in “The Philosophy of Composition” where he said, referring to “The Raven,” that “all works of art should begin at the end”?

SKVORECKY

I knew with *The Engineer* that I would end up with one of the same characters who opens the book, Lojza—a character so simple that he’s virtually unchanged from one political system to the next, and yet he’s happy, whether under the Nazis or the Communists. Of course, the other characters undergo a lot of suffering, changes of heart and conscience, but Lojza has no problems whatsoever.

INTERVIEWER

In the very last scene of the novel, Danny receives a letter from Lojza in Czechoslovakia, who informs him, in broken English, that he's become a writer, too—in other words, a real “engineer of human souls,” as Stalin defined the role of the writer under socialism. And that leads right back to the novel's beginning.

SKVORECKY

Yes, because that's what Danny could—or would—have become had he continued living in Lojza's society. All you need to do is close your eyes, toe the party line, and you can be successful. But Danny's an “engineer of human souls” of a different sort in Canada. He also writes about workers, but of course they're not presented in the light in which they're supposed to be seen according to socialist theory. In fact, one Czech critic writing in a Parisian literary quarterly saw the factory girl, Nadia, as the first really good portrait in Czech literature of a proletarian girl.

INTERVIEWER

The sobering historical experience of which you write in *The Engineer of Human Souls* is redeemed by an irrepressible and irresistible Skvoreckian sense of humor, which operates at two removes from reality. Not only does Danny Smiricky look at the world in a humorous light, but that becomes the light in which you view him as well.

SKVORECKY

Yes, and humorous writers tend to be sad at heart.

INTERVIEWER

Humor is also a defensive weapon, and one that is used to break down barriers. Perhaps it's no coincidence that Kundera's first novel was called *The Joke*.

SKVORECKY

Humor has always been something of a defense. Is there an

aristocratic humor that originates with the aristocracy? I don't think so. But there is a Black humor, a Jewish humor, even a humor that arose at the time of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl—a time of immediate and dangerous threat. My question is, where do such jokes come from? You always hear: "Did you hear the one about . . . ?" but no one seems to remember the ultimate source. Which reminds me, did you hear the one about Reagan's and Gorbachev's bodyguards?

INTERVIEWER

No.

SKVORECKY

Well, Reagan and Gorbachev are having a dispute about whose bodyguard is more reliable, so Reagan calls in his bodyguard and tells him: "Look here, we're on the thirty-fifth floor, there's an open window, so run and jump out of it." And the man falls to his knees and says: "Oh, Mr. President, please don't make me do that, I have a wife and children." So Reagan says, "All right, let's forget about it." Then Gorbachev calls *his* bodyguard, and tells him to do the same thing. So the man runs to the window and Reagan tries to stop him. "What, are you crazy?" the President asks. And Gorbachev's bodyguard falls to his knees and says: "Oh, Mr. President, please let me jump, I have a wife and children . . . "

INTERVIEWER

Not bad, and not all that different, really, from the source of much of the humor in *The Engineer*—different interpretations from different historical contexts which reveal, ultimately, surprising cultural similarities. That's made most clear in *The Engineer* by the literary framework you've imposed on your own historical experience; in the chapter entitled "Hawthorne," for example, your discussion of Puritan intolerance in *The Scarlet Letter* calls to mind the intolerance of the modern Communist state, and makes a striking parallel between two seemingly disparate historical moments.

SKVORECKY

That's true. Remember, also, that each reader brings his or her own experience to bear on an interpretation of a work of art. Many of the incidents in *The Engineer* involving students and their interpretations of literature were taken right out of my own classes in American literature at the University of Toronto. Hawthorne's *Blythedale Romance*, for instance, means something very different to an American or English reader with only a certain kind of experience. Hawthorne was unique in that he experienced a kind of democratic socialism—albeit briefly—under the Brook Farm experiment of 1840, and he recognized the character types such a system produces. The great radical of *The Blythedale Romance* is a type which is not extinct. In the early nineteenth century he would have been a leader of a commune, and that type is with us to this day. So to me, *The Blythedale Romance* is a very realistic novel, and I think of Hawthorne as a novelist who was a realist at heart. But he lacked the necessary technique, because he grew up at a time when romantic fiction was the vogue. His realism, therefore, appears only in fragments of his novels, and in short stories such as "Sights from a Steeple," a beautifully realistic sketch.

INTERVIEWER

How did you conceive of such a literary framework for *The Engineer*, where the implications of the writer—or work—under discussion, from Poe to Lovecraft, complement the moral and political development of your characters? In the opening chapter, for instance, we have the purest statement of an aesthetic—as formulated by Poe—and in the closing chapter on Lovecraft we have its bastardization, just as the first chapter is narrated by Danny—a free soul—and the last scene is narrated by Lojza who has also become a "writer"—of local news for a village weekly.

SKVORECKY

Well, just as the episodic nature of the novel derived from

my flight from Prague to London, this framework was inspired by misinterpretations of my interpretations of American literature, or by other interpretations. For example, there is a famous study of Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* and the thesis is that it's not so much about the Civil War as about a young man's coming of age. Now that may be true to a certain extent, but you can't then say that it's *not* about the war, as some of my students might infer. As for Lovecraft, he's a tongue-in-cheek prophet of doom, and in the sinister *At the Mountains of Madness* Danny sees a prophecy of the future of the world. When he thinks back to Irena, he thinks: "*Dominus tecum.*" Only God can protect her and her class from disaster. Lovecraft may not be a very good writer, but I found the part quoted from *At the Mountains of Madness* extremely powerful. I first read it when I returned from the infectious ward of the hospital where I had hepatitis. My friend who translated Waugh gave me a copy of *Amazing Stories*, which contained *At the Mountains of Madness*, and I started reading it at 11 P.M. while I was waiting for Zdena to return from the theater, and I was scared out of my wits.

INTERVIEWER

Most of the writers discussed in *The Engineer of Human Souls* are nineteenth-century Americans, with strong moral visions. Why so few modern authors?

SKVORECKY

It may have something to do with the dilution of moral issues. I would, however, agree with William Faulkner, who said in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize that there are certain values that must be upheld and propagated. Unfortunately, it seems that today everything has been so relativized, that there's an enormous amount of hypocrisy and stupidity. Each moral question—for example, abortion—has to be questioned in its entirety—from all sides, not just one side. Many issues can't be solved simply, and the duty of the writer is to present the complexity of an issue.

INTERVIEWER

So a writer, from your point of view, does have a moral responsibility?

SKVORECKY

Yes. Which is not to confuse morality with ideology. Ideology is alien to life; it's superimposed on life, and does damage to it. If a writer becomes converted to an ideology and tries to apply it to his work, then he is finished as a writer. Literature should have nothing to do with ideology; when you start writing ideological novels, you are no longer a writer, but a propagandist.

INTERVIEWER

But doesn't a moral point of view frequently embrace an ideological one?

SKVORECKY

It does. But look at Graham Greene. Greene is a Catholic writer, but he never writes a simple ideological tract. All of his novels show the complexity of a religious or political issue. In fact, to a staunch Catholic ideologue, Greene would be a heretic. There was a great Czech poet by the name of Vladimír Holan, whom I used to visit. One day, a steadfast Catholic brought up the question of Greene, and said: "I am afraid Greene will not be saved because some of his novels are really heretical." Infuriated, Holan replied: "I'd rather be with Greene in hell, than with you in heaven!" No, I don't always agree with Greene, but he's a wonderful writer precisely because he approaches difficult moral issues in all their complexity.

INTERVIEWER

Your most recent novel, *Dvorak in Love*, is the first of your major works to be inspired by biography, not autobiography. How did its composition differ from that of your other works?

SKVORECKY

I read, first of all, everything there was to read on Dvorak, though the literature is not nearly as substantial as it is, for example, on Mozart. I visited Spillville, Iowa, a purely Czech village where Dvorak stayed during his visit to America in the 1890s. I also interviewed two one-hundred-year-old women—one who was Swiss, the other Czech—who actually knew Dvorak.

INTERVIEWER

What inspired you to write a novel about the fortunes of Dvorak in America to begin with?

SKVORECKY

The idea really came from an earlier visit to Spillville. In 1969, I had a job teaching in Berkeley, and I got an offer to go to Toronto. Since Zdena and I had two months between positions, we drove across the country. I had known about Spillville, and about Dvorak's visit to it. It's still a charming village, and its citizens are very proud of their Czech heritage.

INTERVIEWER

As different as *Dvorak in Love* is from your other works in conception, it still manages to incorporate many of the same themes.

SKVORECKY

But I have a hypothesis expressed in *Dvorak in Love*; namely, that Dvorak had an indirect influence on the acceptance of jazz in America.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't the music critic Huneker make that point in Dvorak's own day?

SKVORECKY

Yes, but in not so positive a light. When Dvorak died, Huneker wrote that Dvorak's influence on serious American

music was actually detrimental . . . that thanks to Dvorak, we might live to see the day when a drunken Negro would perform in a concert at Carnegie Hall, and that would be called music. Dvorak was impressed—and influenced—by his new surroundings and by the spirit of certain Negro melodies. If you listen carefully to the *New World Symphony*, which was first performed in Carnegie Hall in 1893, you can hear the strains of the spiritual, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” though the opening bars have been omitted. Hunecker was the only American critic who didn’t like it, nor did he like Dvorak. A talented man who never fulfilled his own ambitions, Hunecker claimed that the *New World Symphony* was derivative, and reflected, instead, Dvorak’s ignorance of American music.

But what’s important is that Dvorak was also a teacher. One of his students was Will Marion Cook, who was black. Cook was raised by his mother, studied at Oberlin, and received much of his musical education in Berlin. When he returned to America, he studied composition under Dvorak, and later wrote the first black musical with the black poet Paul-Laurence Dunbar. It was called *Clorindy, or The Origin of The Cakewalk* and appeared in New York in 1898. In his unfinished autobiography, which his son, who still lives in Washington D.C., showed me, Cook wrote that when his mother saw the musical she exclaimed: “Oh, Will. I sent you around the world to become a great musician, and you’ve come home such a nigger!” I’m not saying that Cook became aware of his cultural roots because of Dvorak and Dvorak only—he was, of course, part of the Harlem Renaissance—but if you remember Dvorak’s simple theory that the only way to write great music is to immerse yourself in your native music, you cannot exclude some connection here.

Cook then started his own band, the Southern Syncopated Orchestra—a proto-jazz band which featured several compositions by Dvorak, and was the second black group to tour Europe after World War I, the first being a military one. The first clarinetist was Sidney Bechet, whom Cook had heard in Chicago in 1918. Cook became a successful composer, and was a tutor of Duke Ellington, who credits Cook with having

taught him the fundamentals of composition, and whose "Black, Brown, and Beige," some critics believe, may have been influenced by the "Largo" from Dvorak's *New World Symphony*. Through his students, some of whom became professors at the Conservatory, Dvorak may have had some influence also on such modern American composers as Aaron Copland and George Gershwin.

INTERVIEWER

Ironically then, a Czech composer may have influenced the early development of jazz in America, yet jazz has been banned in Czechoslovakia as a subversive art form.

SKVORECKY

Well, some early American reviews of jazz sound very much like Soviet reviews. The difference is that a reviewer in America has no political power; it's simply an opinion. In Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, a reviewer does have political power, and that's the basic difference between totalitarianism and democracy. So though jazz in America may have aroused a lot of opposition initially, in a totalitarian state, such bias becomes law.

INTERVIEWER

What is the current status of the Jazz Section in Czechoslovakia?

SKVORECKY

The government has been dead-set on destroying it. The Jazz Section was formed in 1971 as part of the government-approved Czechoslovak Musicians' Union, and consisted of a group of jazz aficionados who sponsored lectures on jazz, staged concerts, and organized the international festival held once a year, the Prague Jazz Days. But as membership climbed into the thousands, and the Prague Jazz Days attracted thousands more potential supporters, the government saw a growing movement with a broad base of popular support and decided in 1984 to crack down on the Jazz Section. So they

effectively banned it. The Section itself has claimed that its activities aren't counter to the principles of Marxism. They even built a monument to the United Nations in the fall of 1985, around which they planted "peace trees," two of which were planted by Kurt Vonnegut and John Updike. But in spite of this gesture, the government cracked down again. In September, 1985, seven members of the Executive Committee of the Jazz Section, including its president, Karel Šrp, were arrested in Prague and charged, according to the Communist Party press, with "unauthorized business activities."

INTERVIEWER

Meaning?

SKVORECKY

Publishing books that no official publisher in Prague would touch, such as Bohumil Hrabal's *I Served the King of England* and Jaroslav Seifert's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, as well as a book on music in the Theresienstadt ghetto, a dictionary of Czechoslovak rock-and-roll, Nietzsche's book on Wagner, a study of the work of E.F. Burian, the pre-war Communist avant-garde stage director and historian of jazz, a book on Dadaism, on minimal, earth, and concept art, on New York's Living Theater, and so on. If the trial in Prague takes place, it will be a major violation of the Helsinki accords signed in 1975.*

INTERVIEWER

Do you think Gorbachev's decision to free Sakharov, as part of his campaign of *glasnost*, might have a trickle-down effect in Czechoslovakia and other Soviet-bloc countries?

SKVORECKY

That is another factor. Gorbachev is freeing dissidents, nominating a controversial writer to be the editor-in-chief of *Novy*

* This interview was conducted in 1985. The trial did take place in early 1986 and two leading members of the Jazz Section were sentenced to terms in jail. For details see Skvorecky's *Talkin' Moscow Blues*, soon to be published by Ecco Press.

mir, talking about electoral reform, and trying to put the Soviet system into forward gear, while Czechoslovakia is preparing to stage a show trial, reminiscent of the days of Stalin. Ironically, the Soviet Union today looks like Czechoslovakia twenty years ago during the Prague Spring, and Czechoslovakia now looks more like the Soviet Union. The Jazz Section was never intended as a political organization, but they've become one in response to harassment by the state.

INTERVIEWER

Once again, the state has succeeded in politicizing art. Do you feel that some American intellectuals may be guilty of the same thing, to a lesser degree?

SKVORECKY

In an open letter to Milan Kundera, Norman Podhoretz claimed that Kundera was being claimed by the left, whereas he really belongs with the neo-conservatives. There is a lot of truth in this. When asked in an interview if *The Joke* was about Stalinism, Kundera replied: "Spare me the Stalinism. *The Joke* is a love story." Well, *The Joke* is a love story, but one that's played out under circumstances that are unquestionably political. But if someone is a good artist, like Kundera, his art will naturally transcend politics. Pound is the perfect — almost unbelievable — example, as was Celine, who was a Nazi and a great novelist. The trouble is that ideological regimes don't respect a difference of opinion. Ideology, as Engels said, is false conscience; it falsifies reality by imposing its own structure.

INTERVIEWER

Back to your own writing: was your satire on Army life in Czechoslovakia, *The Tank Corps*, finally published there?

SKVORECKY

It was written in 1954 just after my military service, and finally accepted for publication in 1968, set in type, and illustrated. Then the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia. One of their first objectives on entering Prague was to seize the building

of the Writers' Union, where the union's publishing house was also located. The Russians occupied it for about three weeks, then withdrew, and the editors moved back in. Nothing was missing, it seemed, except for the page proofs of *The Tank Corps*. A few days later an editor found them in some unsuspected place, and the reason was quite obvious: the frontispiece illustration was a magnificent caricature of a group of Army officers' faces, and apparently some Red Army soldier had found it, and penned in, under the most repulsive looking officer's head: *Eto golava prjaklyatoy svini, generala Antona Antonovitcha Gretchka*, which means "this is the head of that fucking pig, General Gretchko." Gretchko was the commanding officer of the invading Soviet forces. This soldier had clearly gotten scared of what he had done, and he hid the evidence. So *The Tank Corps* was never published in Czechoslovakia. It ended up being the first publication of Sixty-Eight Publishers, the Czech-language house Zdena founded in Toronto in 1971.

INTERVIEWER

Though you can't return to Czechoslovakia in person, are your works smuggled back there?

SKVORECKY

We estimate that about 200 copies of every book we publish make their way into Czechoslovakia, where they're avidly read.

INTERVIEWER

Are they circulated and reproduced as *samizdat*?

SKVORECKY

We know they are, because we've received letters from people—particularly during the summer, when many Czechs go to Yugoslavia for vacation—telling us about our books, though the letters are unsigned. Whoever owns a copy really operates as a lending library, maintaining lists of subscribers, and restricting loans to forty-eight hours. The one complaint we've had is that our books should be published in hardcover

since they tend to fall apart after 300 people or so have read a copy. But the books are also copied—though not xeroxed, since access to reproduction machines in the ministries and public libraries is closely guarded. So our books are retyped, and carbon copies are made. Ironically, they're more intensively read in Czechoslovakia than in exile; access to books here seems to reduce interest in them. One of the reasons they're so actively read is that magazines in Communist states are terribly boring. In Bohemia, they publish one literary monthly, and that hasn't changed in fifteen years. They're very big on socialist literary criticism and on state anniversaries. In 1968, when censorship relaxed, there was a sharp drop in book sales in Czechoslovakia because the daily papers and magazines were full of real news. Now, however, there's real interest in books from abroad in Czechoslovakia, because the information they contain can't be gotten elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER

E.L. Doctorow wrote an article in *The Nation* criticizing the American public's passive acceptance of the Reagan administration's policies; Daniel Patrick Moynihan in *The New Republic* diagnosed the country's malady as ideological AIDS; and Alfred Kazin in *The New York Review of Books* lamented the decline of intellectual life in America. What's your view of America from Canada?

SKVORECKY

I think Reagan's been a good president. The American economy seems to be in better shape. He's a traditional conservative, and he's staunchly anti-Communist, in which sense I'm fully sympathetic to him. I don't understand the criticism of Reagan for anti-Communist rhetoric, because this is a system that has killed millions of people. I don't think the Reagan administration has contributed to the decline of intellectual life at all. The fact that you can have *The Nation*, *The New Republic* and *The New York Review of Books* voicing a variety of opinions attests to a healthy intellectual life in America, in my opinion. Such critics should read *Pravda*; then they'd see where there's a lack of intellectual life.

INTERVIEWER

Margaret Atwood has said that most Canadians look at America as if their noses were pressed against a pane of glass, while most Americans think of Canadians as either living in their backyard or front lawn, depending on where they want to put them. Do you find that to be true?

SKVORECKY

She may be right, but remember, I came to Canada in my mid-forties, and at that age all of your associations have already been made: you're a finished product. I'm certainly not a Canadian in the sense that Margaret Atwood is, and I've always sensed that Canadians have a real problem with their national identity. Their main problem is the language; because they speak English, it aligns them with, instead of differentiating them from, Americans. The standard, in terms of money, career and success, also seems to be American. A Canadian actor, for example, will go to America to make it in the movies, just as the major success of many Canadians, from Fay Wray to Mordecai Richler to Margaret Atwood herself, has been in America. But America went through this same phase in the nineteenth century, when writers were judged by the fact that they were American rather than by their literary excellence or lack of it. Poe objected to this prejudice: a book should not be judged on the basis of nationality, he said, but on its merits as a work of literature.

INTERVIEWER

But you closely identify with your Czech nationality in your work even though you are now a Canadian citizen. Do you consider yourself then, a Czech writer, a Canadian writer, or a Czech writer who lives in Canada?

SKVORECKY

I suppose if you make literature dependent on language, then I'm a Czech writer, because I write fiction in Czech. I write articles in English, but one doesn't have to be as at home in a language to write nonfiction as to write fiction. But I'm also a Canadian writer. I now write also about this country

which gave me what I'd never had before: creative and political freedom.

INTERVIEWER

The Czech poet Jan Neruda has written: "Even if thunder rolls and our bones freeze, it is not different from what we suffered through the ages. We will move ahead." In light of the current political situation in Czechoslovakia, is there any hope for the future?

SKVORECKY

I suppose as long as the bomb isn't dropped, there is hope. I understand from friends of mine in Prague and Vienna that the Party bosses are criticizing Gorbachev for going too far too fast. They are afraid that, one day, they might have to invade the Soviet Union to save socialism there. But quite seriously: I don't see how Czechoslovakia can continue on the course they have been on for the past twenty years, and ignore what's happening in the Soviet Union. Otherwise they will find themselves in the situation of Rumania.

INTERVIEWER

How might Westerners help effect change?

SKVORECKY

Through the support of dissidents, through groups such as Charter 77, which was formed in Czechoslovakia to monitor the Helsinki accords, and by protesting human rights violations to President Gustav Husak of Czechoslovakia.

INTERVIEWER

What about more active cultural exchanges between the U.S. and Czechoslovakia?

SKVORECKY

They're good since Americans will be able to export more art, music and film, and it's good for Czechs to be exposed to them since it undermines totalitarianism. But cultural exchanges won't change much in terms of the internal political

situation for Czech dissident writers, artists and musicians who are under increased surveillance. And these people must not be forgotten, because if they are, something might happen to them, and then nobody will ever know.

INTERVIEWER

You said once that you read books as if they contain news from an old friend. What news do your books contain, and for whom?

SKVORECKY

Every writer writes, first of all, for himself. I think my primary readership consists of intelligent exiles because I write about Czechs not only in Czechoslovakia, but also in North America as in my new novel, about the role of Czechs during the Civil War. But I believe that if something has relevance for people of my own nation, then it probably has relevance for everybody, and that there's something universal about it. The accidentals may be different, but the basics are the same, and they're universal.

INTERVIEWER

In what way?

SKVORECKY

Well, I remember reading a book about Tutankhamen's tomb and the discovery of his coffin. Apparently the mummy was surrounded with gold and jewelled artifacts, and on uncovering it, archeologists found on the breast of the mummy a handful of field flowers, which they theorized had been put there by Tutankhamen's young wife. This is such a universal gesture—one that happened thousands of years ago in a foreign culture—and it's still a token of love today. I think certain types of literature do the same thing. What happens to Danny Smiricky in my works, for example, happens to people everywhere. Circumstances may change, and they may change certain people with them, but there's a core of human experience that remains essentially the same. That, if anything, is my message.

—John A. Glusman

The Writers' Trade

Nicholas Delbanco

Mark Fusco sold his novel when he was twenty-two. "You're a very fortunate young man," Bill Winterton proclaimed. They met in the editor's office, on the sixteenth floor. The walls were lined with photographs, book jackets, and caricatures. "You should be pleased with yourself."

He was. He had moved from apprentice to author with scarcely a hitch in his stride. It was 1970, and crucial to be young. One of the caricatures showed Hawthorne on a polo pony, meeting Henry James; their mallets were quill pens. They were swinging with controlled abandon at the letter A.

Bill Winterton took him to lunch. They ate at L'Armorique. The editor discoursed on luck; the luck of the draw, he maintained, comes to those who read their cards. He returned the first bottle of wine, a Pouilly Fumé. The sommelier deferred, but the second bottle also tasted faintly of garlic; the sommelier disagreed. They had words. "There's someone cooking near your glassware," Winterton declared. "Or you've got your glasses drying near the garlic pan."

He was proved correct. The maître d'hôtel apologized and congratulated him on his discerning nose. The meal was on

the restaurant; they were grateful for Winterton's help. This pleased him appreciably; he preened. He spoke about the care and nurturing of talent, the ability to locate and preserve it. Attention to detail and standards—these were the tools of his trade. This was the be-all and end-all, the alpha and omega of publishing, he said.

Mark began his book in his junior year in college, in a writing class. His father was from Florence and told tales about the family—the Baron P.P. who thought he had swallowed a sofa, the passion for clocks his aunt indulged obsessively, the apartment in Catania where they sent the younger sons. Of these characters he made his story, fashioning a treasure hunt: the grandmother from Agrigento whom the northern cousins spurned, the legacy she failed to leave but set her children hunting. He borrowed his father's inflections; his ear was good, eye accurate, and the book had pace. He completed a draft in six months. Then the work of revision began.

Bill Winterton was forty-five and given to hyperbole. He had been a black belt in karate in Korea; he had known Tallulah Bankhead well, and Blossom Dearie; he had heard Sam Beckett discourse on Joyce. He drank and lived in Rhinecliff and was working on a novel of his own. Mark's book was slated to appear the second Sunday of July. "That's the first-novelist season," Winterton informed him. "Coming out time for the debs. We want to get attention while the big boys are off at the beach. Not to worry . . ." He flourished his spoon.

Mark worked that summer on his second novel in Wellfleet, at a bicycle rental garage by the harbor; he also served ice cream. He spent long hours clamming at low tide. He liked the brief defined conviviality of work, the casual commerce with strangers. He rented the upstairs apartment of what had been a captain's house. "Everybody was in whaling," said his landlady, Mrs. Newcombe. "All the men in Wellfleet." Her house had a large widow's walk, and furniture and ornaments from the China trade.

He was sleeping with the daughter of a real estate agent in town. Bonnie returned from her sophomore year at Simmons

to find the local boys inadequate; they whistled and hooted at tourists, and lounged on the Town Office steps. They made peace signs and shouted "Flower Power!" and wore ponytails. They went drag racing on the sand and passed out drinking beer. She was small and blonde and sweetly submissive and had hazel eyes. Her father would kill her, she said.

Mark had read that writers lived along the ponds. He saw them on Main Street, buying papers or fish, wearing beards. He watched them strolling on the dock, wearing caps at jaunty angles, smoking pipes. He heard them at The Lighthouse, conversing over coffee, and at the public library, where they donated books. He told himself he too would be a man with a mission, apart.

His room had a view of the dock. He had a double bed with a board beneath the mattress and brass bars painted white; he had a chest of drawers and a rolltop desk beneath the window. He organized the pigeonholes, the stacks of twenty-weight paper, the marmalade jar full of pens. The paraphernalia of habit codified, that summer, into ritual observance. He made himself strong coffee on a hotplate; he bought a blue tin cup. He played solitaire. This permitted him, he felt, to stay at his desk without restlessness; it engaged his hands but not his attention. He could sit for hours, dealing cards.

He wrote his pages rapidly, then rewrote at length. The little ecstasy of correction, the page reworked if a syllable seemed inexact, or missing, the change of a comma that felt consequential, the tinkering and achieved finality: all this was new to Mark. He recited paragraphs aloud. He read chapters of his second novel to the mirror, conscious of inflection, rhythm, emphasis. He blackened the blank pages with a sense of discovered delight.

Mrs. Newcombe's parlor shelf had Roger Tory Peterson, and *Songs the Whalemen Sang*. An ancestor had figured in Thoreau's *Cape Cod*. She owned *The House of Seven Gables* in a leather-bound edition; she had instruction books on quilting and the *Just So Stories* and *The Fountainhead*. He loved the smell and heft of books, the look of endpapers, the crackle of pages and the literal flavor of print. He loved the way words

edged against each other, the clashing, jangling sounds they made, the bulk of paragraphs and the linear austerity of speech. He recited lines while driving or at Fort Hill gathering mussels; they formed his shoreline certainties while he watched the tide. A phrase like "shoreline certainties," for instance, seemed luminous with meaning; it served as his companion while he shuffled cards.

At Columbia he had argued philosophy and baseball with his suite mates; he ate spareribs at midnight and went to double features at the Thalia and New Yorker and took his laundry home. His thesis had focused on Karenin and Casaubon—the stiff unyielding husbands in *Anna Karenina* and *Middlemarch*. There were parallels, also, between Vronsky and Ladislaw, those weak romancing men. The question most urgently posed, he wrote, is how to live a life alone when urged by a secular power to succeed, a secular temptation to accede—or, as Lewis Carroll put it, "Will you, won't you join the dance?"

His book had a blue cover and its title was handsomely lettered. The first copies had arrived. A bird ascended—framed by temple columns—from the sea. The stages of production grew familiar. But that his work would be transformed—that strangers in another town would take his words and reproduce them—this careful rendering in multiples proved his first sense of public presence, the work existing elsewhere also. His career, he understood, was in the hands of strangers—someone who might read the book to whom he had not handed it, someone who might help or hinder from an indifferent distance. The recognition startled Mark. He was the master of his soul, perhaps, but not the captain of his fate. He was reading Joseph Conrad and could recite Henley's "Invictus"; such comparatives came readily to mind.

"I don't know you," Bonnie said.

"Of course you do."

"No. Not any longer."

"I haven't changed," he said.

"You're changing. Yes you are."

She turned her back to him. It was beautiful, unblemished; he traced the white ridge of her spine. She shivered.

"I'll only be away three days."

"You won't come back."

"Of course I will."

"I mean you won't come back to me." She fingered the pillow.

"Make up something for your parents. That way you could come along."

"No."

"We'll figure something out."

"I wanted to be at the party. I'm so proud of you. A publication party. I did want to celebrate."

"You'll be there anyhow," he lied. "You go with me where I go."

" 'Parting is sweet sorrow . . . ' "

" 'Such sweet sorrow,' " he corrected her. Mark flushed at his involuntary pedantry. To counteract the rightness of her accusation he pressed her back down in the bed. She was all the more exciting when she cried.

His parents had scheduled a party. They were proud of his achievement and would celebrate on publication day. They lived in Rye, New York. His father took the train to Manhattan, working for an import-export firm. He dealt in bristles, hides, and furs; he placed orders for kolinski, Chunking 1¼, Arctic fox, and seal. They were moderately prosperous and happy, they told him, to help. He drove an MG. It was British racing green, a graduation gift. "From here on," he promised his mother, "I'm enrolled in the school of real life."

She thought this phrase enchanting. Much of what he said enchanted her—his pronouncements on fashion, for instance, his sense of the cartographer as artist, mapping the imagined world from its available features. She had two vodka martinis every afternoon at five; he joined her on the porch.

"My son the poet," she said

"Except it's fiction, Mom."

"You'll always be a poet." She swallowed the olive intact.

His mother liked occasions. She was not sociable and did not attend parties herself. But she welcomed the caterers' bustle at home, the porch festooned with lanterns, the garden sprouting tables and white plastic chairs. She gave birthday and anniversary parties, graduation parties, wedding parties. The house was large. She felt less lonely entertaining, she explained; they should put the place to use. She asked him for a guest list six weeks in advance.

He listed friends from Columbia, his editor, the publicity woman, his cousin, a classmate from high school who was an all-night DJ. His father invited business associates; his mother included the children or parents of friends. She disliked a party at which everyone knew everyone; a party ought to take you by surprise.

She made a habit of pronouncements, and then repeated them. One such repeated assertion had to do with variety, the spice of life, the way ingredients invariably vary. He humored her. He had come to recognize his parents needed humoring; his father's politics, for instance, had to be avoided when they met. His father admired Judge Julius Hoffman. He wished the judge had thrown the book at those impertinent Chicago-based conspirators; he was afraid of Hoffman's leniency, he said. He trusted Mark. He knew his son refused to bite the feeding hand.

On the Sunday of the party, he drove from Wellfleet to Rye. He reached the Sagamore Bridge in a sudden cloudburst and pulled off the road to raise the convertible top. Tugs whistled in the canal; Mark saw the line squall receding. His book was coming out that day; he would celebrate that night. He opened his shirt to the rain.

There was much weekend traffic; he made New London by ten. He wondered if the tollbooth tenders worked eight-hour shifts. They would take coffee breaks. They would bring a heater with them in winter, soft drinks in styrofoam cups; they would have portable radios for music and the news. They would have a grandson in Spokane. This grandson played the drums. Mark was learning to provide corroborative detail for his characters: birthday parties, a distaste for lima beans, a

preference in socks. "Make a catalogue," his writing teacher had advised. "Make it on three-by-five cards. Know everything you can. Tell yourself the person despises lima beans. Try to decide if she likes snow peas or string beans better, and if she wears a girdle, and if she sleeps soundly at night."

He took the turnoff after Playland and reached his house by two. It was a sprawling half-timbered slate-roofed structure; there was a three-car garage. His mother met him at the kitchen door. "Congratulations," she said.

"I made it," Mark said, stretching. "Six hours on the nose."

"It's a wonderful review."

"What is?"

"You didn't know?"

He shook his head.

"A beautiful review," she said. "In this morning's *Sunday Times*. I thought they would have told you."

"No."

"They must have planned to make it a surprise. It's wonderful. You'll see."

The pantry was filled with salads. There were trays of deviled eggs. The review was prominent, and generous; he had heard of the reviewer, and she made much of his book. "Classic and unmannered cadences," she wrote. "Fidelity of mind and spirit, a tale told with economy and grace." The novel avoided those pitfalls young writers so rarely avoid; she hailed "an auspicious debut." His mother clapped her hands. "They've been calling all day long," she said. "We tried you up in Wellfleet but you'd gone already."

His parents knew an author who wrote children's books. The books' hero, Ernest the dog, was anything but earnest and was, in fact, mischief itself. Ernest got into, and barely escaped from, trouble; he was a cross between a dachshund and Dalmatian—known as a dachmatian to his friends. Mark, nine, disliked the books. His parents thought them cute, however, and gave him *Ernest in the Monkeyhouse*, *Ernest Goes to Boarding School*, *Ernest and the Alligator Swamp*. There were elaborate inscriptions from the author for his birthday, for Christmas, or when he was sick. Ernest had a pal called Busy Bee. They

helped each other out—when Ernest was being chased by the men from the dog pound, for instance, Busy Bee distracted them; when Busy Bee was slated for the honeymill, Ernest picked the lock.

One day the author came to lunch. His name was Harold Weber, and he had a big white beard and was completely bald. Like one of his own characters, he wore a blue velvet vest. His wife, who died three years before, had been Mark's mother's cousin; they kept distantly in touch. Harold Weber drove a Lancia; his father admired the car. "This is your biggest fan," he said, presenting Mark. "He knows *Ernest Goes to Boarding School* by heart. And *The Frying Pan and Fire*. That's his favorite."

That November had been blustery; the last dark leaves of the Japanese maple beat at the bay window. Branches blew past. His father said, "Let's have a fire," and a voice from the chimney said, "Wait!" "What's that?" his father asked. "Wait, won't you?" called the voice. "I have to get my family out first. We fell asleep. Tell them not to start that fire till I get Busy Bee out."

Harold Weber leaned against the mantelpiece. He was smiling; his mouth moved slightly, and his Adam's apple worked. Yet the voice came from the chimney, not where he stood beneath it. Mark said, "You're doing that," and Harold Weber bent, shaking his bald head, raking his beard with his fingers, looking up the fireplace and saying from what seemed like the window, "He's not."

Then there were drinks. There were cheese biscuits and shrimp with plastic toothpicks impaling them on a cabbage, so it looked as if the cabbage grew multicolored quills. "Don't poke me," said the cabbage. "I get ticklish if you poke." Then the cabbage giggled, and Harold Weber laughed. "I guess we'll have that fire," he said to Mark's father. "I guess Ernest helped old Busy Bee to get his family out."

That day he knew he'd witnessed magic—not the poor ventriloquy but the invented voice. A creature from a page had spoken to him, Mark, from a familiar place. He adored Harold Weber through lunch.

The party started at six. His father's business partners, his uncle from Arezzo, his neighbors arrived. They congratulated him. They offered wine and a leather-bound notebook and a subscription to *The New York Review of Books* and champagne. His sister's plane was late. She took a taxi from La Guardia and clattered in, exuberant, embracing him. "I knew you could do it," she said. She told him that Johns Hopkins was a prison, and medical school like some sort of boot camp or jail; she hadn't slept in weeks, and then just for an hour with the surgeon on the cot. She laughed with the open-mouthed braying hilarity that meant she did not mean it. "I love the place," she said. "Seriously, kid."

The caterers served drinks. They set out food. There were several pâtés and salmon mousse and sliced roast beef and a whole ham and veal in aspic and caviar and water chestnuts and vegetable dip. Bill Winterton drove down from Rhinecliff. He accepted scotch. "It's quite a spread," he said. Mark was uncertain if he referred to the tables piled with food or to the house itself; "It's a question of proportion," Winterton observed. "Your folks are spending more for this than we paid for the book."

His friends appeared. They drove from Manhattan and Riverdale and Westport and Larchmont and Barnegat Light. They arrived in pairs or carloads and three of them came on the train. Betty Allentuck traveled alone. She had been living with Sam Harwood, his close friend; she and Sam had broken up that spring. Sam was on a Fulbright in Brazil.

Betty had thick chestnut hair, long legs and high wide hips. Her breasts were full. She smoked and drank and swore with what he thought of as erotic frankness; he had envied Sam. They brushed against each other in the foyer, and she kissed him happily. "Your big night," she said.

"I'm glad you're here."

She kissed him again. "Later," she promised, and they went out on the porch.

Spotlights in the oak trees lit the far stone wall. There were lanterns and torches as well. There were aromatic candles in glass jars. His father moved among the guests, wearing a

pinstriped blazer, looking like a politician, pumping hands. The punch was good.

His friends attended him. They asked about the Cape, they praised his tan, they asked for free copies or where they could buy one or if he would sign books they brought. They talked about themselves. They were in law school and business school and advertising agencies; they were moving to Los Angeles and Spain. There was a rope hammock, slung between two maples; Betty lay inside it, swinging, sandals off. His father's accountant said, "Mazeltov," pointing in what seemed to be her direction; his uncle asked about his plans, what he was planning next. There were checkered tablecloths and helium balloons in clusters anchored by his book. The balloons were blue and white.

Then there were toasts. Bill Winterton said he was pleased, and Mark should get to work. He hoped and trusted this was the beginning of a long career. There was applause. Mark's sister said, I want to tell you, everyone, his handwriting is rotten. Scribble, scribble, scribble, Mr. Gibbon. People laughed. There was a toast to the reviewer for the *Times*: may her judgment be repeated. I'm proud of you, Mark's father said, I'm grateful you folks came. Imagine what this food will look like in the morning, said his mother; please everybody take seconds. Help yourself.

By the time dessert arrived, he had grown impatient. It was nine o'clock. Dessert was cake. His mother said, "You cut it, dear," and led him to the serving table. They made space. The cake was large, rectangular, its icing fashioned in a perfect likeness of the cover of his novel. The blue sky and the bird outstretched against it and the pillars with his name inscribed—all were reproduced. He was embarrassed. "Beautiful," they chorused. "It's magnificent." "The word made sugar," said Billy the D.J. "Take of my body. Eat, eat."

There were photographs. Flashbulbs popped repeatedly while he smiled and blinked. His mother provided a knife. "You cut the first slice, author."

"I can't."

"It's the book's birthday. We made it a cake."

"I don't want to."

"Please," she said.

He took the knife and flourished it, then stabbed the air. He wielded it as if it were a saber, impaling, conducting. In the angle of his vision he saw his mother's face, shocked. He advanced as might a fencer, left arm curled above the shoulder, wrist cocked, thrusting. She would construct indulgence yet again. There were a hundred portions, and he hacked.

"You were wonderful," said Betty.

"When?"

"With the cake. I loved it."

"You're in the minority."

She put her hand on his arm. "When the party's over would you take me home?"

"Is that a proposition?"

"Yes."

The guests dispersed. They took their leave of him as if he were the host. There were pots of coffee for those who had to drive. The caterers cleaned up. His parents and his sister rocked companionably on the porch. "You'd never make a surgeon, Mark," she said. "Look what you did to that cake." He told them he was taking Betty to New York. He claimed a bottle of champagne, said thank you to his parents, and promised to return by dawn. "Drive carefully," they said. "To the victor," said his sister, and they laughed.

The MG's top was down. The seats were wet. He dried them with his handkerchief, and Betty leaned against him, and they kissed. Headlights from a turning car illuminated their embrace; she did not turn away.

They drove into Manhattan in their own created wind; she rested her hand on his thigh. The city spread beneath them like a neon maze through which he knew the track, a necklace suspended from the dark neck of the river. At the Triboro Bridge tollbooth the attendant said, "Fine night." He found a parking space in front of her apartment, and they closed the car. "I've wanted this all year," she said. "Haven't we been virtuous? It seems like I've waited all spring."

The sex was a promise delivered. Betty took him into her with a high keening wail, a fierce enfolding heat; she flailed against him in the bed, repeating to his rhythm, "God, my God, my God." He was proving something, celebrating, displacing his friend in her flesh; he battered at her till she cried, "I love you, Mark." He wondered, was that true. They drank champagne. The ache in his knees, in his back, the plenitude of travel and arrival and release, the long day waning, the radio's jazz, the whites of her eyes rolling back—all this was bounty, a gift. Each time he entered her she begged him, "Stop. Don't stop."

On Tuesday he and Winterton met again for lunch. This time they ate at Lutece. "Word is the *Newsweek* is good. And *The Saturday Review*." He handed Mark *The Saturday Review*. There was his photograph, and a review entitled "Timeless Parable." Again he had heard of the critic; again the assessment was kind. "I wish I could have written a book this good at twenty-two. I could not, and very few do. There's a major talent here. Hats off."

"Publicity is ringing off the hook," said Winterton. "Don't let it go to your head."

"I'm working on a story," Mark announced.

"Good."

"It's about discovery. Self-discovery. A boy who sleeps with his best friend's girlfriend, then finds out she's the Muse."

"Don't spoil it by analysis."

"I'm not. I'm only telling you."

"Well, don't." He pressed his palms to his temples and then extracted glasses from his coat. He had not worn glasses before in Mark's presence; he studied the menu with care. "There's nothing that can happen now," he said, "that's anything but a distraction to your work. If the praise continues, if it dies down or changes or stops. All of this"—he waved his hand—"it's beside the point. The point is to keep working, to not stop."

He said this with bitterness, smiling. The first course arrived. Thereafter the mood lightened, and Winterton grew

expansive. Ernest Hemingway drank rum, and Scott drank French 75s, and Bill Faulkner drank Jack Daniels; he emulated them all. You can tell a writer's models by which drink he orders, at which bar.

His tennis game was off. He had lost his backhand and his overhead. His marriage was a warring truce, his boy a diabetic and his secretary couldn't tell the difference between Tolstoy and Mickey Spillane if her raise depended on it; his eyes hurt. No one read Galsworthy now. No book buyer in this room—he raised his arm, inclusive—could tell him, he was certain, where “The apple tree, the singing and the gold,” came from, and what was its original.

Mark too recited a verse. “Samuel Smith he sells good beer/His company will please./The way is lit and very near/It's just beyond the trees.”

“What's that?” asked Winterton, incurious, and Mark said he read it in Wellfleet. It was a tavern motto from a tavern washed away. The whalers weighed anchor off Jeremy Point—but all they found was pewter now, a bowl or two, some spoons.

“Mine's Sophocles,” said Winterton, “in the Gilbert Murray translation. ‘Apples and singing and gold . . .’ ”

The garden room was full. Light slanted through the windows; women laughed. Mark had taken the train to Manhattan and would take it home again; his car was being serviced in the garage at Rye. They drank Italian wines, to honor what Bill Winterton described as his true provenance; it seemed important, somehow, to pretend they were in Italy. This went against the decor's grain; the waiters spoke in French. “You know where Napoleon comes from? It's a riddle.” Winterton coughed. “The question is what nationality was Napoleon at birth? I ask you, ‘Can you answer?’ and the answer's, ‘Corsi-can.’ ”

This seemed uproarious to Mark—witty, learned, apt. They celebrated lengthily, and there was nothing he could not attain, no prospect unattainable. Walking to Grand Central he breathed deeply, weaving. He made the 4:18.

The train was old. Mark wandered to the forward car; the conductor waved him in. The gray seats were unoccupied, the windows dark. He sat sprawling in the windowseat while the train filled up.

A woman with two shopping bags settled beside him. She wore a pink knit suit and had a purple handbag and white hair. He made space. She produced *The Saturday Review*. The train lurched and rumbled forward, and he told himself his father made this trip five hundred times a year. They stopped at 125th Street, and then they gathered speed.

He needed water. He wanted to sleep. His neighbor read the magazine with absorbed attention and came, on page twenty-three, to his photograph. He was sitting on a rock in front of Long Island Sound. His tie had blown over his shoulder, his hair was engagingly tousled by the propitious breeze. He wanted to tell her, "That's me." He wanted her to know that she was sitting next to Mark Fusco, novelist, whose first book earned such praise. He imagined her shocked disbelief, then recognition. She would tell her husband, when she got off the train at Pelham or Greenwich or wherever she was getting off, "Guess who I sat next to, guess who I met on the train?"

Mark was on the verge of telling her, clearing his throat to begin, when the train braked. Momentum threw him forward; he jerked back. They had no scheduled stop. His neighbor had her handbag open, and its contents spilled. "What was that?" she asked. The whistle shrieked. He bent to help her gather pens, a tube of lipstick, Kleenex, keys. "What was that?" she asked again.

They remained there without explanation. The train lights flickered, dimmed. He tried to open his window but it had been sealed shut. Brown grime adhered to his hands. His head hurt. He excused himself to drink from the water dispenser, but there were no paper cups. He pressed the lever nonetheless, and water trickled out. In the space between the cars conductors huddled, conferring. They looked at their logbooks, their watches. The next stop was Larchmont, he knew. He tried to see the Larchmont station down along the track; he saw the

New England Thruway and apartment buildings and gas stations and what looked like a supermarket and a lumberyard. The train had been stopped in its tracks. He understood, abruptly, the force of that expression; he returned to his seat and repeated it. "The train has been stopped in its tracks."

Then there were rumors. The train had hit a dog. It had hit a car. It had narrowly avoided a collision with a freight; the switching devices failed. The President was on his way to New Rochelle, and traffic had therefore been halted. There were work slowdowns, strikes. The woman to his right protested the delay. Her husband would be worried silly; he was a worrier. He liked to feed the cat and canary just so, in sequence, and if there was some change in the schedule, some reason to feed the canary first, he worried for the cat.

Mark drifted, nodding, sweating. They would know him at Lutece. He would buy a pipe and captain's hat and lounge along the dock.

The grandmother from Agrigento buried donkey bones. She told her children there was treasure at the temple site, and they ought to dig. They were greedy; they vied for attention. She lay dying by the seawall, seeing her progeny fight, watching them swing shovels and threaten each other with picks.

Her favorite nephew watched too. He had flown to Sicily on a visit from the north; he was torn between two women — a big city sophisticate and the girl next door. The grandmother stretched out a finger like a claw. He mopped her brow with flannel soaked in lemon water; he ground rosemary and garlic and fed her moistened mouthfuls of bread and olive oil. Her house was bright with broken glass embedded in cement. Barbed wire festooned the doorframe like a climbing rose.

"Giovanni?" she said.

"Grandmother?"

Her voice was as the sea on gravel. "When there's treasure, stupido, you look for it here." She scratched at her ribcage, then nodded. "You understand, caro, the heart?"

He understood, he said. Dolphins played in the white surf.

This teetered on the verge of sentiment, said Winterton, but it might be profound.

Then the conductor appeared. His hair was brown, and he wore a handlebar moustache. He stood at the front of the car, expectant, gathering an audience. They quieted. "We're sorry to inform you"—he cleared his throat, repeated it—"I'm sorry to inform you of the cause of our delay. There has been an accident. A person or persons unknown has been discovered on the track. That's all I can reliably report." His voice was high. He relished the attention, clearly, and refused to answer questions. "That's the statement, folks."

Police appeared beneath the window, with leashed dogs. There were stretcher-bearers and photographers; it was beginning to rain. He said to the woman beside him, "I need air." Then he followed the conductor to the space between the cars. "Can I get out and walk?" he asked. "I'm late. I know the way." They would not let him leave. "I might be sick," he said. They pointed to the bathroom door, unlocked.

The bathroom reeked of urine; the toilet would not flush. He held his nose and gagged. He braced himself upon the sink and stared at his reflection—hawking, bleary-eyed, pinched. " 'The apple tree . . . ' " he mouthed. What was out there on the track found him irrelevant; it proceeded at its chosen pace, and Mark was not a witness they would call.

In the next two hours, waiting, he learned what he could of the story. He heard it in bits and fragments, the narrative disjunct. A body was found on the tracks. It had been covered with branches and pine boughs and leaves. It had been a suicide, perhaps, or murder. It was female and, judging by hair color, young. The engineer had noticed the leaf pile ahead and slowed but failed to stop. By the time he identified clothing underneath the branches, and what looked like a reaching hand, he could not halt the train. No blame attached to his action. The body had been crushed. There were few identifying marks. Bone and flesh and clothing shreds were scattered on the engine, spattered on the cross-ties and beneath the first

two cars. If the act were suicide imagine the anticipation, the self-control awaiting death; if murder, the disposal of the corpse. Forensic experts had arrived to gather evidence. Police were searching the approach roads to the overpass, and all nearby foliage. Traffic was delayed in both directions, therefore, while they combed the tracks.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," he said to his parents that night.

"For the Cape?" his father asked.

"So soon?" his mother asked.

"I need to get to work again."

"We wouldn't bother you," she said. "We'd leave a tray at the door."

"We'd screen your calls," his father said. "We'd say, 'No interviews.' "

"I didn't mean it that way. I left my work in Wellfleet."

"Coffee?"

"Please."

They settled in the living room. He tried to tell them, and could not, what had happened on the train—how his blithe assumption of the primacy of art was made to seem ridiculous by fact. It was flesh and not Karenina that spread across the track. It was rumor, not a cry for help, he heard. What impressed itself upon him was his picture in a magazine, and Betty's lush compliance in, and enactment of, his fantasy, and how much money Winterton might spend for lunch. Mrs. Newcombe's ancestor spat in the coal grate. Bonnie will not take him back, will work in the Town Library; she runs off with the drummer from Spokane.

He would write it down, of course. Mark made notes. It would become his subject; he would squeeze and absorb and digest it—as might have, once, the Baron P.P. He would throw his voice. It would take him time, of course, but if it took him twenty years he'd balance the account. He would feed the canary, then cat.

Two Poems by Albert Goldbarth

Lithium Sonnet

Judith, I've seen the CPA. She showed me two
indomitable columns, numbers rising like the legs
of a statue god. And where they add up, where
they meet in a kind of pedestal at their bottom, they
declared such a sense of solidity and completion, you,
especially you, would have wept at the beauty.

And Judith, the carpenter visited. We joked about her
many minor trials, making a go of it in
a "man's world," then she got down to the monstrosity
of chainsaw, and the nearly-pubic delicacy of shavings.
At the end, she had an instrument: its bubble centers
whenever the work is centered enough to be done.

Let them be totems, let them be invoked.
For the balance. For the level.

Domains

July. The ragweed's ultramealy sex is in the air
and, with the window wide for breeze, is in whatever
damp reception-pits my cranium throws
open to such drift. The tradeoff's halfass cool
for fullblown clog, and nothing's going to please me.
8 p.m. I close the window when the viciousness of 12-year-olds
across the street accrues too much: "You fartface,
Julie! You asshole ass!"—from one. And from another:
"Drooly Julie eats boooooogers! Go rot with boogers!"
She does go—crying, I can see, and from what I can see
her major crime is she's twice the size of the others, tush
a gravity-sagging target just begging for insult, and
a set of Asian/Negro features mixed past the borders of peer
acceptability. A truly shitty day. Although

* * *

I lug up *Peritoneum* to *Quagga* to bed: *Pollen*
is, it turns out (as by irony
our nemeses often are), beautiful: some spin about like planets
of cathedrals, with their complex Gothic architecture
spired pole to pole; corsages, panpipes, freeway systems
of pollen, starbursts of pollen, honeyglazed hams. And
"the underwater flowering plant" of the Mediterranean
Sea, *Posidonia*, waves in fields of flat-green
ribbon-like leaves: "the stamens discharge their pollen
as long threads floating away in search of fertilization."
—Milt-pollen! Undulant otherworld meadows
of otherblossoms, where "air" is ocean; "breezes," ocean currents;
"drowning," living . . . What a wondrous thing to dim with
into dream . . . Where Otherme

* * *

cowers or struts in his Also-gestalt, at home
in the logics, at home in the lusts, of Otherhome . . . When
Skyler finally eases into bed, and angles and re-angles
comfy composition of self and sheet, then puffs her
sleepbreath down my neck, an alien presence, an intimate fit,
the nudging bump of rump on rump in darkness . . . I'm
awake in any case, sinuses full-tilt into sludge production.
I trudge downstairs, defeated by my own tissues and even
so, amazed at how lucky we are we love each other this
way this much. Sitting by that window: I'm in moonlight's living
silverplating. Well, actually I'm triangulating sunlight.
There are so many domains. And Julie doesn't know it
yet, but she's traveling through time at a ferocious rate. She's
going to live in another world. She's going to be someone's
flower.

Two Poems by David Lehman

Perfidia

You don't know who these people are, or what
They'll do to you if you're caught, but you can't
Back out now: it seems you agreed to carry
A briefcase into Germany, and here you are,
Glass in hand, as instructed. You rise to dance
With the woman with the garnet earrings, who is,
Of course, the agent you're supposed to seduce
And betray within the hour. Who would have known
You'd fall in love with her? Elsewhere the day
Is as gray as a newsreel, full of stripes and dots
Of rain, a blurred windshield picture of Pittsburgh,
But on the screen where your real life is happening
It is always 1938, you are always dancing
With the same blonde woman with the bloodshot eyes
Who slips the forged passport into your pocket
And says she knows you've been sent to betray her,
Or else it is seventy degrees and holding
In California, where you see yourself emerge unscathed
From the car crash that wiped out your memory,
Your past, as you walk into a gambler's hangout
On Sunset Boulevard, in a suit one size too large,
And the piano player plays "Perfidia" in your honor
And the redhead at the bar lets you buy her a drink.

Henry James: The Movie

The film begins in Venice
As conceived by the dreamer before
He begins his journey, which ends
At the Bridge of Sighs, where the college friends
Quarrel, make up, declare their vows and divide
The city between them. There is
A moment of terror when the gondola
Enters a tunnel and the foolish younger sister
Yields her heart to the conquering hero
Who ends up with egg on his face because,
Well, because Europe was wise and old
But also decadent and eager to corrupt
Innocent America, ripe for the plucking,
Like the fruit of knowledge, desired, denied.

*He spoke with a slight stutter. She answered
By putting her hand on his, a gesture meant
To soften her reproach. She hadn't forgotten
The snow-lipped balconies of Venice—the image,
That is, not the memory, since the image
Preceded the memory and was sacred to her,
A talismanic phrase she used not to cast a spell
But to break one. It failed her here. "You don't
Understand," he said, refusing her hand, as though
He were determined to be misunderstood.
"I feel like the boy who ran away
Hoping to distract his father and mother
And so put an end to their quarrel in low voices,
Their words too cumbersome to comprehend."*

And there is the sickening odor of violets
In the hotel rooms of Venice,
Where man, wife and mistress live in separate rooms,
And each of them knows that in this city of water,
Whose streets reflect the buildings, the sky,
And the interior lives of privileged tourists,
The woman will betray her husband to their son
Swearing him to secrecy, but everyone
But the sculptor himself (whose friends call him "Master")
Knows he's a fraud, and when the old retainer
Arrives, bearing a spurious document on a tray,
The eloping lovers can feel sad without knowing why
While in the room next to theirs sleeps a man
Who has come to Venice to die.

Five Poems by Les A. Murray

The Cows on Killing Day

All me are standing on feed. The sky is shining.

All me have just been milked. Teats all tingling still
from that dry toothless sucking by the chilly mouths
that gasp loudly in in in, and never breathe out.

All me standing on feed, move the feed inside me.
One me smells of needing the bull, that heavy urgent me,
the back-climber, who leaves me humped, straining, but light
and peaceful again, with crystalline moving inside me.

Standing on wet rock, being milked, assuages the calf-sorrow
in me.
Now the me who needs mounts on me, hopping, to signal the
bull.

The tractor comes trotting in its grumble; the heifer human
bounces on top of it, and cud comes with the tractor,
big rolls of tight dry feed: lucerne, clovers, buttercup, grass,
that's been bitten but never swallowed, yet is cud.
She walks up over the tractor and down it comes, roll on roll
and all me following, eating it, and dropping the good parts.

The heifer human smells of needing the bull human
and is angry. All me look nervously at her
as she chases the dog me dream of horning dead: our enemy
of the light loose tongue. Me'd jam him in his squeals.

Me, facing every way, spreading out over feed.

One me is still in the yard, the place skinned of feed.
 Me, old and sore-boned, little milk in that me now,
 licks at the wood. The oldest bull human is coming.

Me in the feed yard. A stick goes out from the human
 and cracks, like the whip. Me shivers and falls down
 with the terrible, the blood of me, coming out behind an ear.
 Me, that other me, down and dreaming in the bare yard.

All me come running. It's like the Hot Part of the sky
 that's hard to look at, this that now happens behind wood
 in the raw yard. A shining leaf, like off the bitter gum tree
 is with the human. It works in the neck of me
 and the terrible floods out, swamped and frothy. All me make
 the Roar
 some leaping stiff-kneed, trying to horn that worst horror.
 The wolf-at-the-calves is the bull human. Horn the bull
 human!

But the dog and the heifer human drive away all me.

Looking back, the glistening leaf is still moving.
 All of dry old me is crumpled, like the hills of feed,
 and a slick me like a huge calf is coming out of me.

The carrion-stinking dog, who is calf of human and wolf,
 is chasing and eating little blood things the humans scatter
 and all me run away, over smells, toward the sky.

Gun-E-Darr

The red serpent of cattle, that eclipsed the old dreaming
serpents:

there it still is, faintly, winding out of far lilac ranges
onto the grassed sea-floor of the plain. The shortest distance
between two points being, in life, the serpentine
it was dissimulation to have angled it to a crankshaft
of official roads. I saw it, smoking high and raw with dust
as it curved and lengthened in its first days. And if taking
the continent was no walkover, then there were brave men
on both sides, amid the bellowing, the scattering whipcrack
undulations
and sleepy flooding onward of the blood-red cattle serpent.

The Tube

for Ann Moyal and Rob Crawford

Many resemble Henry Sutton
in sleeve-links in Ballarat
who invented television;
later several would do that
but not in eighteen eighty seven.

“Telephany”—he named it well:
his Greek was more correct.
His design was theoretical
but: Nipkow disc and Kerr effect
and selenium photocell,

all were there. It would have worked
and brought the Melbourne Cup alive
to Ballarat, which was his object—
but no one had yet sent an aerial wave
and wire had this defect:

signals couldn't race so fast
along it that they'd sustain a picture.
Only when the horse-drawn age was past
could horses surge into the air
with music and gunfire, galloping broadcast.

Tremendous means, and paltry vision:
some will dare ask you about that
in your interview, Henry Sutton,
in Ballarat, in your floreat,
standing telephanous on your front lawn.

Cave Divers Near Mount Gambier

Chenille-skinned people are counting under the countryside
on resurrections by truck light off among the pines.

Here in the first paddocks, where winter comes ashore,
mild duckweed ponds are skylights of a filled kingdom

and what their gaze absorbs may float up districts away.
White men with scorches of hair approach that water,

zip into black, upturn large flap feet and free-fall
away, their mouths crammed full. Crystalline polyps

of their breathing blossom for a while, as they disturb
algal screens, extinct kangaroos, eels of liquorice colour

then, with the portable greening stars they carry under,
these vanish, as the divers undergo tight anti-births

into the vaults and profound domes of the limestone.
Here, approaching the heart of the poem they embody

and thereby make the gliding cavern-world embody,
they have to keep time with themselves, and be dull often

with its daylight logic—since to dream it fully
might leave them sprawl on the void clang of their tanks,

their faceplates glazing an unfocussed dreadful portrait
at the apex of a steeple that does not reach the day.

The Emerald Dove

We ought to hang cutout hawk shapes
in our windows. Birds hard driven
by a predator, or maddened by a mirrored rival
too often die zonk against the panes'
invisible sheer, or stagger away from
the blind full stop in the air.
It was different with the emerald dove.
In at an open sash, a pair

sheared, missile, in a punch of energy,
one jinking on through farther doors, one
thrown, panicked by that rectangular wrong copse, braked
like a bullet in blood, a full-on splat of wings
like a vaulter between shoulders, blazed and calliper,
ashriek out of jagbeaked fixed fury, swatting wind,
lights, keepsakes, panes, then at the in window out, gone.
A sparrowhawk, by the cirrus feathering.

The other, tracked down in a farther room
clinging to a bedhead, was the emerald dove,
a rainforest bird, flashed in beyond its world
of lice, sudden death and tree seeds. Pigeon-like,
only its eye and neck in liquid motion,
there, as much beyond us as beyond
itself, it perched, barefoot in silks
like a prince of Sukhothai, above the reading lamps and
cotton-buds.

Modest-sized as a writing hand, mushroom fawn
apart from its paua casque, those viridescent closed wings,
it was an emerald Levite in that bedroom
which the memory of it was going to bless for years
despite topping our ordinary happiness, as beauty
makes background of all around it. Levite too
in the question it posed: sanctuary without transformation,
which is, how we might be,

plunged out of our contentment into evolved strange heaven,
where the need to own or mate with or eat the beautiful
was bygone as poverty,
and we were incomprehensibly, in our exhaustion,
treasured, cooed at, then softly left alone
among vast crumples, verticals, refracting air,
our way home barred by mirrors, our splendour unmanifest
to us now, a small wild person, with no idea of peace.

Two Poems by Robert Pinsky

The Ghost Hammer

Foundry of the dead, the dead invisible hammer
Forgotten that dropped to forge
The ring behind the doorknob: brass roses
The trade tongue calls them, and forges the words—
Tongue, strike-plate, shaft, escutcheon, exhaling tarnish
Onto your hand that reaches unknowing toward them
Over and over in doorways and all but touches.

Shaft and claw, clangor and fission:
The brazen tongue of Babylon.

The faint implacable hammer behind the hammer
Homing the die and bevel and framing the house.

Hammerdust air, a contagious powder of blows.

Mattock that breaks the earth.
Sacrifice, felling the house.

At the window
Where children are walking home from school it showers
Around their heads: the burst of particles that spray
Up from the anvil unnoticed over the children
And onto the window—sash, lights, mullion and sill,
Molecules that gild the panes and film the moist
Pupil of the eye with ashy silver.

Airhammer in the street
Tireless and violent in a fissure
Of pavement. Warhammer of Tristram or Shiva.

Old hammer of mortal perfection, idolatrous hammer
 Of golden calves and birds, the shingle maker
 Wielding his maul and froe, dead jeweler's hammer
 Forcing a braid of silver into the vessels
 Of living bodies, heartworm
 Tendrils and cilia. Shapes taken out of nature
 In wires of laurel or olive. Roses.

Pounding: the bell shaped strokes.

Oh heavy swollen pump, the urgent pressure
 Lifted in desire.

Hammer of love hammered by the hammer of words.

Futile the prophet Ezekiel's curse on the sledge
 Hefted by the weary idol-smith who works
 Hypnotized faint with hunger beyond his supper
 By lamplight, thirsty, and beyond his death
 Lifting the ponderous shaper.

In his anger
 Ezekiel said to smear the bread in the ovens
 With Babylonian shit, as a mouth penance
 For graving images, but the very baker
 Pounded and pounded the dough and twisted the
 Ropes of the bread of affliction
 Into crown shaped loaves.

Braids, images.

Blind tool of perfection, bludgeon
Handed from the dead who drive you
Hand on the doorknob between Sheol and Creation,
Stalled on the threshold, unable to cross.

Pounding of the heart,
Inherited drum of the doorway.

Mattock of want, sickle of Kali, bare hand
Of hunger—you too have lifted it and let it fall,
You have committed images, the tool
Is warm from your hand.

Immortal Longings

Inside the silver body
Slowing as it banks through veils of cloud
We float separately in our seats

Like the cells or atoms of one
Creature, needs
And states of a shuddering god.

Under him, a thirsty brilliance.
Pulsing or steady,
The fixed lights of the city

And the flood of carlights coursing
Through the grid: Delivery,
Arrival, Departure. Whim. Entering

And entered. Touching
And touched: down
The lit boulevards, over the bridges

And the river like an arm of night.
Book, cigarette. Bathroom.
Thirst. Some of us are asleep.

We tilt roaring
Over the glittering
Zodiac of intentions.

The Temptations of the Pleasure

Amor Towles

VI. [REDACTED]

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

[REDACTED] my door between myself and other com[REDACTED]

~~ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 08-19-2010 BY 60322 UCBAW/SJS~~

~~_____~~ I will
tell you, though only if you wish it, what I picture to myself ~~_____~~

~~the following information is for your information only, and is not to be used for any other purpose.~~

I only wish it were within my power to offer, and within yours to receive, a settlement of the whole account. You must be con-

~~[REDACTED]~~

~~[REDACTED]~~

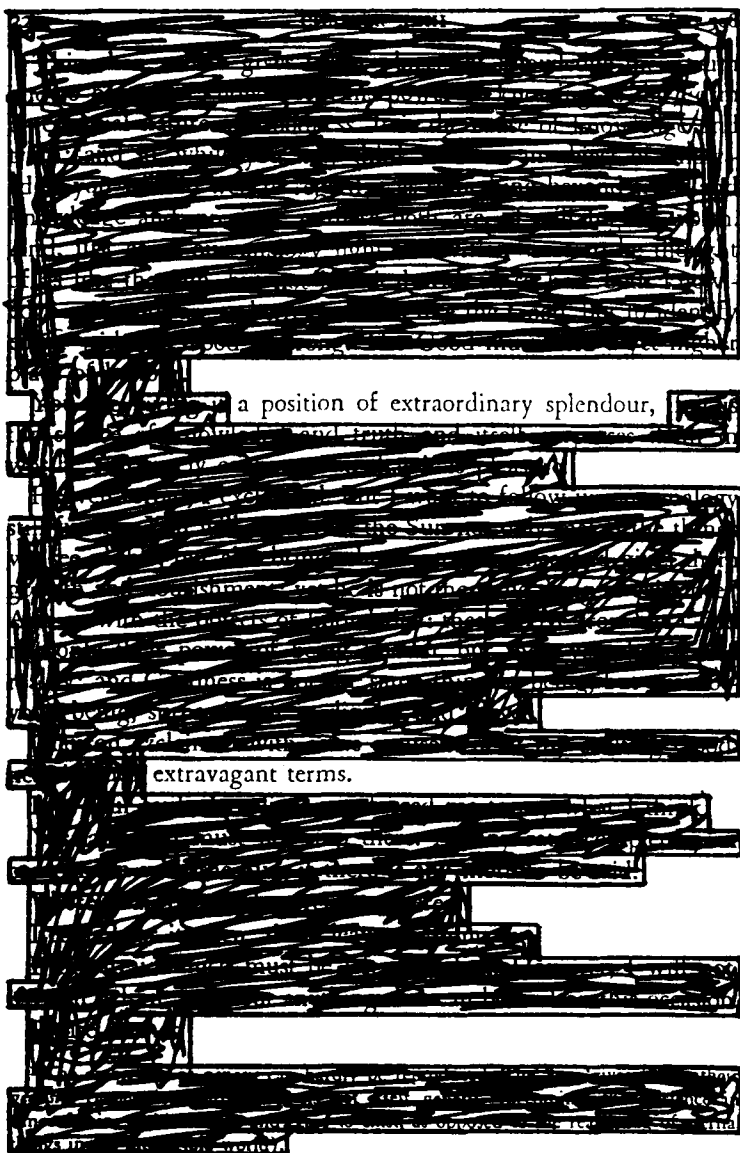
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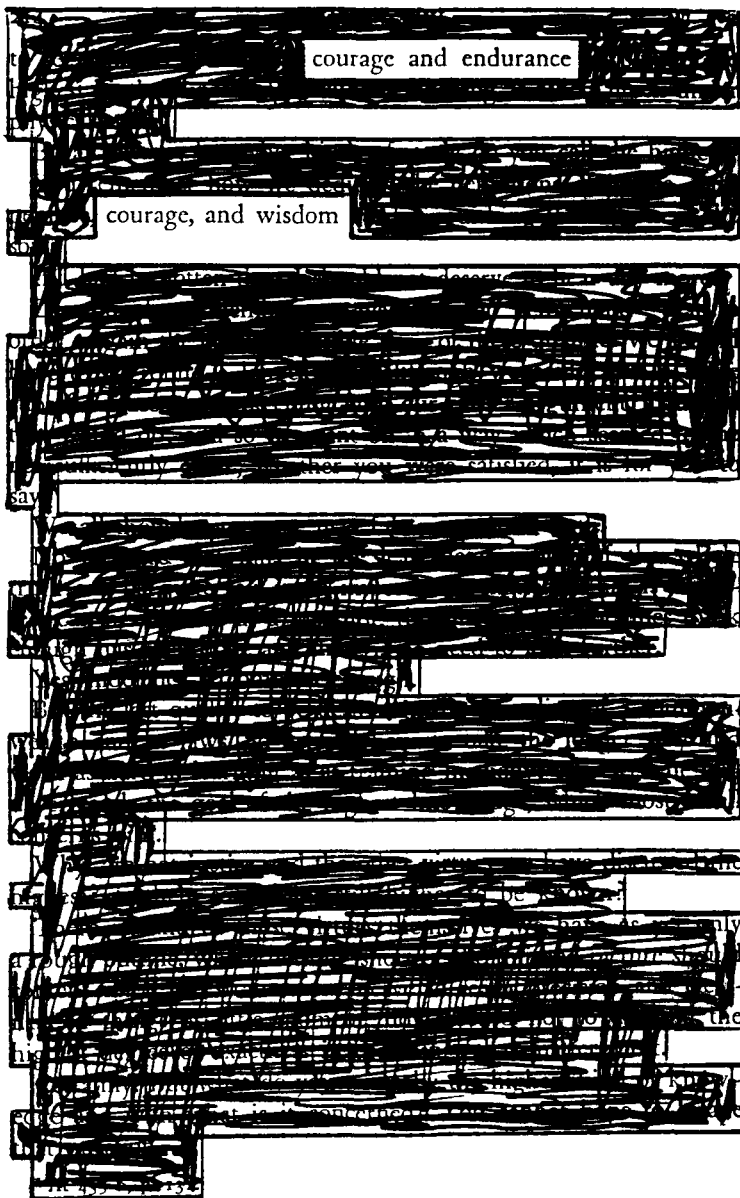
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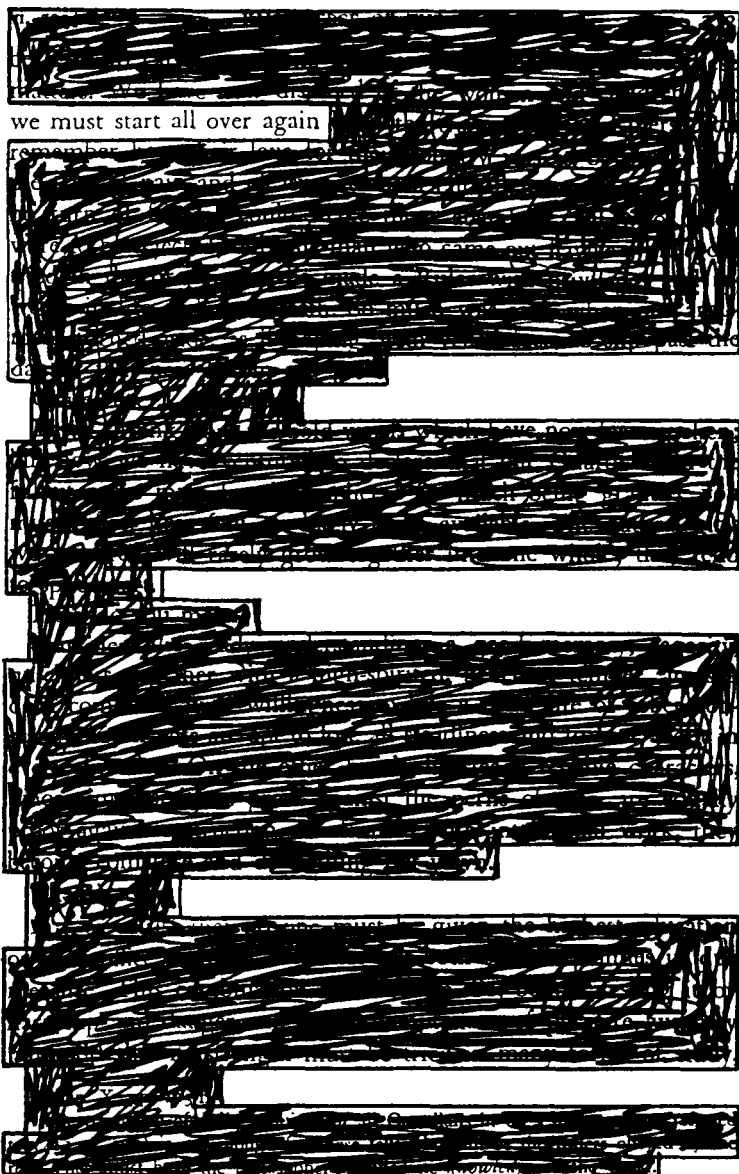
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I remember.

the temptations of pleasure,







—Plato, Book Six of *The Republic*

The Caliph Stork

But if they laughed while they were transformed, the word would be forgotten.

—Boris Tomashevsky

When Boris Tomashevsky told his wife, Emily, about the afternoon he spent on Portobello Road, he neglected to mention the owls made of glass. First, he took off his coat and remarked what a lovely day it had been outside. It had been perfectly brisk, he said, the kind of day that does wonders for the heart. He asked her how her afternoon had been and told her of his own.

“It’s a road of a hundred city blocks,” he explained, “and on a particular section, about twelve blocks long, they’ve filled the street with vendors of every kind.” It was not the meager hodge-podge of the Moscow market-place, he wanted his wife to understand, but an incredible variety of things for sale. And although he didn’t say it to Emily, he imagined that everything in the world, with the exception of slaves, was openly sold in its stalls.

He told his wife how the customers would move from keeper to keeper gauging the fairest rates for the specific items they desired. And if by chance they found the same product on two adjacent tables they could initiate a bidding war between the two shouting salesmen that would resolve itself in an unimagined depreciation of price.¹ It was for this reason, Boris learned from a stranger, that businessmen dealing in similar goods very often situated themselves at opposite ends of the road.

He told her how the street was lined with trees and the men and women walking its length appeared to be a mix of aristocrats and laborers; or of royalty and peasants, as he put it. And the street ran from east to west, so as the afternoon wore on, the shadows of the people along the road seemingly stretched forever.

This all took place on the second day of their visit to London. They had actually been traveling for several weeks by

then; in fact, at two o'clock on January 8 in 19--, or if you prefer, on an afternoon in winter, B. Tomashevsky and his wife Emily, both nearly sixty years of age, left Moscow by train in order to visit the various capitals of Europe.

It was eventually while waiting for a carriage on a small street in Paris that Tomashevsky had suggested they visit London (counter to their plans of remaining on the continent itself). At the time, Emily didn't respond to her husband, but it was clear that she was reluctant; she was unsettled by the idea of traveling the Channel, and she had heard from her friend Isabelle or Sonia, or whichever one had visited the city, that the weather in London was cold and unkind, and she didn't know a single word of English, not even the simplest phrases such as *I apologize* or *pardon me* or *thank you*.

But Boris, who had read the English novelists, had what he called a burning desire to visit England. It was a landscape he could imagine only with the greatest difficulty. As he read, he found himself discarding image after image in his slow approximation of the heath and the bridges and the fog. It all seemed peculiarly alien, with the possible exception of Baker Street, which years after reading the books he could still picture vividly.

Ultimately, Boris understood as they approached the station in Paris that it would simply be a matter of being honest with his wife, of telling her what a digression to England might mean to him. They would have to extend their trip, of course, a little later into spring than planned. And they would have to exchange some tickets, and purchase others, but an opportunity to visit the city would probably never arise again.

Sitting on a bench in the station, their conversation lasted for half an hour and as a result their journey continued for three months more. After five days they arrived in London and made arrangements to stay in a hotel.

Walking through Sutton Park, Tomashevsky had come across the street merchants entirely by accident. He was drawn by the sounds of a stringed or percussive instrument playing in the distance. So he crossed the lawns to the south, passed through the park's iron gates and found himself in the midst of activity.

Where another traveler might have felt estranged or isolated, suddenly lost in the crowds on such a street in a foreign city, Tomashevsky felt more at ease here than he had at the festivals in Austerlitz, along the alleyways in Spain, on the narrow Venetian canals, or at any other time in any other place since the winter afternoon that he and Emily had departed from Moscow by train. There were children cutting constantly between the legs of adults, with their hats folded and tucked in their pockets and objects in their hands as if they were all practicing thieves. There were beautiful women walking arm in arm without escorts or the fur-lined hats that characterized the streets of eastern Europe. There were so many voices calling out at once that with his first step into the crowd, the drifting sounds of the instrument were immediately obscured.

In many ways, Tomashevsky was overwhelmed with the familiarity of his surroundings; with a sense that through some comparison of dates and circumstances, or by the motif of a sign—an amulet or birthmark—he would recognize a stranger in the crowd. He was struck by a sudden rush of certain memories of childhood and other places. And vaguely, he found himself expecting a Russian Kaftan to appear amidst the European cloths. After all, in antiquity the discovery of a lost son or mother was a common event.

Then as he passed a table covered in coins and other currencies he noticed an old woman seated on the ground with a piece of tapestry, folded, and upon it a pair of glass owls. The owls, which seemed to be the only objects the woman had for sale, were exquisite. They were as the icons discovered in Egypt, though strangely miscast in glass; and their craftsmanship was so immaculate, one could imagine them speaking in human languages or taking flight from the ground and beating their wings before the tired old woman's eyes.

It was difficult to imagine how the woman had come across them. It suggested that some time in the past she was of a different station; that she was slowly left alone by the ravages of death and distance until everything of those years but these was long since lost or broken or sold.

Then just as he was about to approach her, the acrobatics of a thirteen or fourteen year old girl caught his eye. She was

farther up the road, turning slowly on her hands with her bare feet poised above her. And as she balanced, the musician who had originally lured him from the park began to play.

The musician, an unshaven man in a thick black jacket, was seated on an overturned barrel, playing an American instrument known as a dulcimer, and occasionally calling on the crowd to watch the astounding gymnastics of the girl. Although the girl was truly magnificent, Tomashevsky found his interest drawn to the musician who was built with the arms of a ditch-digger or harborman. His body was so suggestive of lumbering strength that it was hard to reconcile his figure with the deft motions of his hands and the fragile acrobatics of the girl. Tomashevsky became so determined to see if the man was the father of the girl that the woman behind him was completely forgotten.

We learn from Tomashevsky's biography that throughout the later years of his life he kept a journal or diary erratically. It seems that over a period of a month or several weeks, and in one case a year, he would refrain from writing anything down at all. Then suddenly he would transcribe a single event in perfect detail, from beginning to end. From the perspective of these records, his whole life could be considered a journey from one situation to another.

Tomashevsky never dated the entries and they can only be organized in relation to his deteriorating script, brought on by the advancing stages of arthritis, and eventually the stroke which forced him to write with his left hand. Scattered from one memory to another, these entries appear to have spanned over the last ten years of his life, beginning just two years before his wife died of tuberculosis.

But the various entries hold no surprises for those of us who are unfamiliar with Tomashevsky's life. In certain years there had been a cold winter, a humid summer, and on given days friends had died; friends of Emily's, and friends of his own. There were the houses of his neighbors spread among the silver fields, isolated from each other by a sudden snowstorm, with smoke turning upwards from their old broken and rebuilt

chimneys. There were Emily's and his three children that were all lost to childbirth or an infant's pneumonia. There were the variety of things which one could develop into stories, as if, by enlarging the limits of reality, we might reach the general human interests, problems of love and death, which may be the fixed bases of the entire course of human history. Sleep, delirium, optical and other illusions; wild remembrances, respite from labors, vivid pictures, amusement, emotion, clamor—the variety of things which occur when we are born, live, grow old, and die.

Walking on Portobello Road, for instance, as Tomashevsky later told his wife, he saw an Eskimo, a coffin maker, a station-master, captain's daughter, wanderer, bride, and officers of the navies and armies of France. And as he walked he could pause at any instant, overhearing the complications that were arising and subsiding around him: a father wanting his daughter to marry, and the daughter assigning impossible tasks; a priest collecting quitrent from the devil; a soldier's defeat and the machinations of enemies frustrated. These are the ties, the ordinary and commonplace connections, that you encounter even amongst strangers: the love of the hero for the heroine and her love for the rival. It is simply a matter of a thousand conversations taking place at once. A thousand conversations encountering obstacles, reaching resolutions, conclusions. It was in the wake of all the voices of humankind that Tomashevsky felt himself enter the park, returning in the brisk winter air to his hotel.

The arrangement of any of these materials could be easily changed, I suppose, to follow the afternoon from Emily's point of view. It could be said that when her husband suggested they go outside for a walk through London, Emily answered, there were certain letters she had been meaning to write, and so stayed behind. There was an old friend whom she had danced with at times who had made a name for himself in America as a painter. There was her sister who lived near the Black Sea, who she hadn't seen in six, or was it seven years

by now. But watching her husband turn up Hyde Street, from the window, she found herself gazing down at the traffic of people and carriages and the automobiles.

From her chair by the window she could look across the rooftops that tapered to the south, and follow the solitary figure of a chimney sweep stepping from building to building like a character in Wagner crossing the empty stage. She could sit at this window and wait for her husband who would return, perhaps, in time for tea with a spindle of thread hidden in his pocket; a thread that seemed finer to his eye than the Russian threads, not coarse or even strong, which he bought in order to give to his wife at another time, on a similarly cold afternoon where the delicacy of the thread would be rare, and would evoke all the splendor of a day spent somewhere else. She could trace the dwindling light as the shadows cast by the various buildings cut across the streets, inviting the evening to fall on an almost lonely afternoon.

Seeing Goethe From Behind

I was told we had arrived in Vitznau. Above the village towered a high mountain, and my father now explained to me that this was the Rigi. We went to a small station building, and there stood the strangest locomotive in the world.

— Carl Jung

Franz Jung was standing alone in his garden when he read the telegram concerning the suicide of a friend. As he stood there, among the flowers and statuary, under the clear blue sky that has come to characterize Switzerland in the minds of Americans, the telegram seemed catalyst for a most extraordinary moment in time. And only gradually, in the course of the following days, did it dawn on him that nothing had happened. It was during Easter of the year 19--.

When Franz received the telegram he was working in his



garden, lining his flower beds with stones. For some time he had been collecting them from the shale of the foothills and the shores of the lake. Even when traveling abroad (which was admittedly less and less frequent), if he saw a particularly appropriate stone, he would pack it away in his luggage and carry it back with him to Switzerland.

For Franz, it all brought back the days of his childhood when he had collected the eggs of various birds. During the springs he had hiked through the woods near Hünigen, hunting all the species of *Garrulus*, *Erithacus* and *Streptopelia* to be found in the Jura mountains; climbing the trees of the

Rhineland plain and carrying the eggs to the ground with an almost exaggerated care.

When the telegram arrived, he carried it through the house, laid it unopened on the patio table and went back to his work in the garden.

Looking back, it might seem odd for Franz to leave an unopened telegram on a patio table while finishing the simple task of laying stones around the edge of a bed of roses; but by then we were all familiar with the arrival of telegrams. We had all spent afternoons in front of our radios, or in the Arab coffee houses waiting for friends, overhearing the news that someone had crossed the Atlantic by plane, or that on August first the world war had broken out.

There was a period in Franz's life when, much in the same way, it seemed as if half his time were being spent in the railway stations of Europe. On any given evening in the month of July, the trains might be running an hour to two hours late. So Franz would sit on a wooden bench completing his correspondence, or when it was crowded he would stand at the edge of the platform and watch the trains for Lisbon arriving and departing, the lights coming on in the station house, the two Italian women exchanging a cigarette; he'd go over the details of a conversation, he'd buy a London or Paris paper, he'd ask a stranger for the time.

Eventually, Franz would go through the old photographs that were stored in the attic, looking for a picture of the friend who had killed himself. While in the garden with the telegram in his hand, he had naturally had the fleeting impression that such a photograph, capturing the range of expression in the features of the face of his friend, had been taken one afternoon, and was now somewhere in the house.

In one box at the top of the attic stairs he found a thousand black and white photographs taken at different times in different places. There were photographs of his children and of his parents, of distant relatives and friends. There was a child in the shadows of a canopy, a colleague resting on the steps of

an oriental chapel, a woman in tears, a boat which was moored a hundred feet from shore on a day which was perfectly calm. There were so many pictures of himself and so few of his wife.

Whether it's a familiarity with this thought of an architect growing older, or an intuition into the terrible sanctity of photographs, there's such an overpowering impulse to go over them all in detail. It's so apparent that a picture of any event is only a facade behind which its meaning lies hidden, a meaning already known but maliciously, so to speak, withheld.

It's a feeling which others have described in the past. Sitting in the balconies of a small theater seeing Anna Pavlova dance in the immediate distance, one's attention was always drawn to the pale, luminous quality of her art; to the delicate gravity and the sense of broken solemnity that lingered in the mind like anamnesis. As in the words of Chaplin, the moment she made her entrance, no matter how gay or winsome she was, I wanted to weep, for she personified the tragedy of perfection. But it was the speed of the cinema at the time which failed to capture the lyricism of her dancing, so that her art has been lost to the world.

It wasn't until the following day, after waking a little earlier than usual, that Franz called Marseilles. He had actually met his friend's wife on only one or two occasions but remembered her vividly as a beautiful, gypsy-like woman, whose voice was a mixture of accents. She had married his friend when she was only twenty years old, when Franz and his friend were forty-eight. It may have been this difference in ages that made him feel so apprehensive about placing the call.

The operator told Franz it would take fifteen minutes or so for the call to go through, and that he should remain on the line. And when the connection was finally clear, Franz was surprised at how quickly he recognized Salome's voice and again when she recognized his own. They spoke for only a few minutes, and with his French so rusty, much of the conversation was lost. In Franz's memory, the girl was familiar with several languages, but even so, he knew it would have been

strangely inappropriate to speak in German or even English, just as it would have been inappropriate to ask if there had been a note, or if she had discovered the body, or if anything had been left behind. Instead he asked her questions about the ages of the children and the seasons of Marseilles.

For several days, the fog had been drifting off the lake in the early hours of morning, enshrouding the garden for an hour or two and casting the house in a cool, grey light. But this morning, as Franz sat at the desk waiting for the call to go through, the wind was beginning to blow from the other side of the valley and he watched with attention as the fog was slowly driven across the surface of the water. And for these few minutes, as Franz sat with the receiver in his hand, it may have seemed that he had reached the edge of the inhabitable earth.

But a singular morning in the season of Easter in the life of Franz Jung is hardly an historical fragment, or an excerpt for which the preceding and succeeding events are missing. On the contrary, this passage of however many years provides one with an advantage of perspective, allowing one, perhaps unfairly, through a familiarity with certain facts, to place these minutes in a context of history.

Regardless of how vital a participation there is on the part of the reader, when Franz is described sitting alone in his study, there is an inescapable sense that on this particular day the headlines were dominated by the subjects of corruption and trade embargoes, the stock market was closing at record highs, in many places there was a wave of hope in a reappearance of Christ. It's not as if this were something which in reality were taking place somewhere else; it's more like pollen, or the scarlet fever carried in the clothes of missionaries.

Franz couldn't find a photograph of himself with his arm around his friend, or of the two of them talking over breakfast, or of his friend standing at the end of a pier with his back to the camera. All he could find was a photograph that his friend had taken while traveling in Africa and mailed to him from France.

They had both traveled extensively at one time, and had

often met in foreign cities by arrangement and by chance. Whenever they met, out of habit they would trade the books back and forth which they had been carrying and already read. So that in anticipation of meeting somewhere in Spain, they would underline certain passages for each other's benefit; or as happened on one occasion a particular page could be torn from the book.

Franz crossed the study and removed the old Italian painting that hung opposite his desk² (which had somehow come into the family years before) and hung the photograph in its place. It was of a beautiful square in the city of Tunis, and as he recalled, it was taken in May, and the journey from the Mediterranean coast to the city itself had taken thirty hours by rail. In the picture, a shadow cuts dramatically across the face of a building and the square is nearly empty, due perhaps to the heat of the afternoon. While on the cool streets that extend from the periphery of the square, slightly outside the frame of the photograph, a blind musician plays a drum beside a ragged beggar; an old Jewess of unspeakable ugliness goes by in white baggy breeches; a crier with a load of bur-nooses pushes through the crowd.

During his childhood Franz used to pose questions to himself which he would systematically solve. He would spend hours of his afternoon imagining the various changes which would have to take place under the particular circumstances determined by a hypothetical situation. Like on a summer day while traveling alone with his parents, he had seen the Rhine from a carriage window and reimagined the local landscape in every detail having wondered if, instead of this river, all of Alsace were a lake.

The arrangement of the stones in Franz Jung's garden was beautifully precise. The cool white surface of the rocks accentuated the color and the texture of each flower in a very simple way, that was apparent even though it was well into the evening when he had finished the work. As he opened the telegram he'd received that day, he vaguely studied the design of the garden in relation to the yard as a whole.

But in the instant that Franz finished reading the telegram the sun dropped perfectly over the horizon and six or seven sparrows nesting in a pomegranate tree at the garden's edge took flight, as if the disturbing sound of a pistol were suddenly heard in the monastery of the world.

The thought of Franz standing in his garden with a telegram in his hand has always evoked for me an image of a woman crossing a New York City street, while in the distance the Fall River Ferry steams around the point of Manhattan with all its tremendous skyscrapers, then up the East River under the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, right through the endless tangle of tugboats and barges and freighters, and on across the Sound behind Long Island.

Baader's Watch

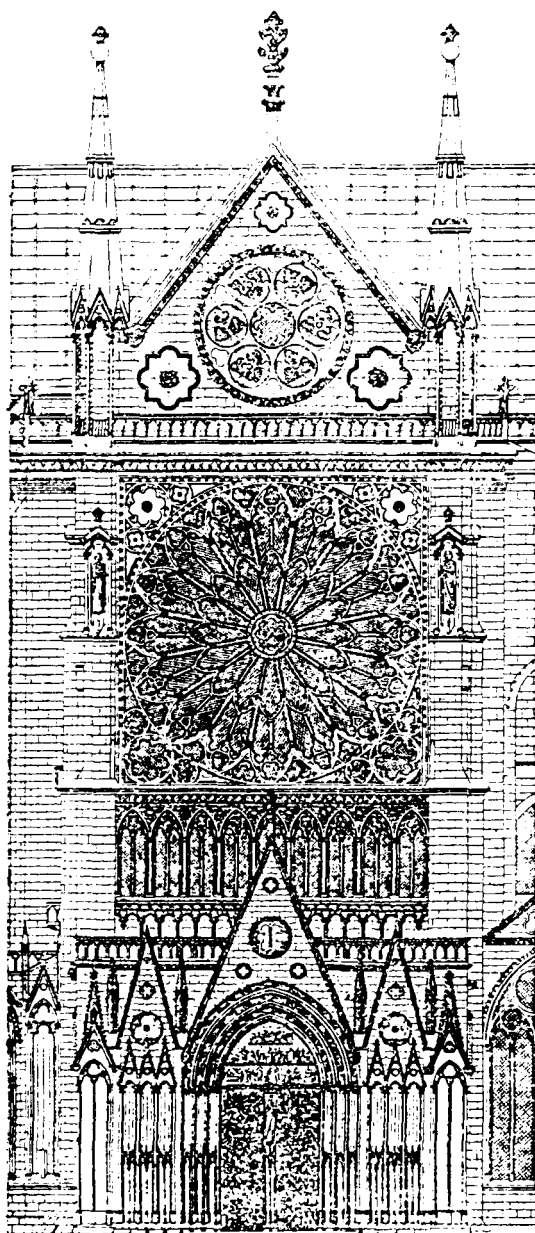
Let us g and se k ou the true individual genius who must exist in some section of our nation, if we are not to become an extinct race.

—Johannes Baader

One beautiful summer evening in 19--, a woman Baader hadn't seen for years ran into him by chance. It was on the Rheinstrasse in Berlin and a gentle twilight hovered over the wide streets flanked with tall buildings.³ Trams slid along under verdant trees between the grass verges and as she was crossing the street she saw Baader standing on the opposite corner,[†] leafing through the bills and scraps of paper in his

[†] When Helena came out of the bakery and crossed the street it was that part of the evening when the shops in the French quarter were closing and people were everywhere; like in the streets of the Old Testament.

In the midst of this crowd, Helena was vaguely watching for a cab; and Baader, sifting through the scraps of paper and foreign currency that had accumulated in his wallet over time, was completely absorbed in his task, whatever it was. So it seems unlikely that she would have noticed Baader at all if her attention hadn't been drawn to him, when something obvious, like a bright red ticket stub, had fallen from his wallet to the ground.



wallet. It had been a cloudy summer that summer and it was just growing cool when she approached him and said hello.

At first, Baader seemed distant. As they talked with each other he watched the traffic and turned his wallet over in his hands rather than putting it away in his coat. It was a manner that she might have described as shyness if Baader had been a child, but under the circumstances she was afraid that in approaching him on a crowded street after so many years she may have committed an indiscretion. But it was Baader who suggested they sit in a café and have something hot to drink, when she had wished him well and turned to go.

Johannes Baader and Helena Meré first met in Berlin at the beginning of the war, or perhaps a little earlier. At the time, Helena was living in the theater district with David and she was a stunning woman. Her beauty was Egyptian, an anachronism in a culture where Marlene Dietrich would soon be openly recognized as the most beautiful woman in the world. But when Helena and David dined at the restaurants on the Rue de Bolin she was often mistaken for an American singer or at times for an heiress which in a strange way she preferred. It was the startling combination of her black hair and her bright blue eyes that drew the attention; bright blue eyes which were always heavy and dark as with insomnia or addiction.

In those years, she would see Baader occasionally at the house on the Veldingstrasse where he and the Argentine (who was later killed) played a billiard game of their own invention for hours at a time. She would see him bargaining with the fruit sellers in the open markets and lingering outside the opera house, sitting on the edge of a fountain, watching the well-dressed men and women of Berlin funneling out of the gilded doors in the minutes after the finale. When she was introduced to him, he was described by a mutual friend as someone who was everywhere at once.

But ever since Baader had returned to Germany, he'd grown farther and farther apart from his old colleagues and the others. In the correspondences and the journals you can trace

the few references that remained during those years—the inquiries as to his whereabouts, and the depictions that seem more and more inaccurate or vague or sentimental. In a letter dated October 24th, from N. to his brother, he relates a rumor that Baader has been married and divorced; in another letter an admirer mentions seeing him from a distance. As H. would eventually write in his memoirs, “by December of the following year, he had disappeared from the face of the earth.”†

At the time this story takes place, the German language was already riddled with pronouns. In the conversational speech of the children on the outskirts of the park where the bicycles were lined along the fences, or of two beautiful women walking arm in arm along an esplanade, or of the brokers exchanging their opinions on the stock market floor, there was an ongoing selection of certain words in place of other nouns, designating people and things which had apparently been mentioned before, or were somehow understood in relation to the individual contexts. Demonstrative, distributive, indefinite, interrogative, personal, possessive, reciprocal, reflexive, and perhaps relative, most of all. It was a strangely systematic substitution of the general for the specific as in response to the indelicacy of a proper name; as if the nomen or the onuma had become suddenly and effectually taboo.

The smell of opium smoke and Spanish perfumes lingered in the cloakrooms of the cabarets and casinos and there was a gypsy circus which due to rumors of petty theft could not obtain a visa and remained in the city near the Potsdamer Platz for the entire summer, turning its Ferris wheel to the

† “...In June of the same year Baader and I were walking through the fields of the Südende [where Gattlinger was then living]. I remarked that I had never been to America and Baader, without a second thought, said that we should travel there together. He said there were certain things he couldn't tear himself away from at the time, but that we should plan to leave on the first of January two years hence. At that, we began making our plans, and Baader listed six or seven locations we would have to visit without fail. But by December of the following year, he had disappeared from the face of the earth. As I recall, it was the Mississippi River that Baader wished to see once before he died...”

same calliope love songs, over the same patch of ground. There were seven locomotive engines in the stockyards of the Alphestrasse, each of them perfectly oiled, two of them founded in the great steelworks of the Alsace, and all of them for sale, eventually. While the windows broken in the war had been carefully replaced.

Perhaps that was the reason for the elaborate language, the piling up of metaphors, the hymnlike raptures.

In the forecourt of a little café not far from where they ran into each other, Baader and Helena ordered coffee. Their conversation was, as one might expect, a series of questions about each other and others they might have met equally by chance (or heard from or seen or sought out for some reason). It's a conversation so familiar it has a feel of nostalgia all its own, as if it too had taken place in the past, in an altogether different time. In the course of it, they would probably speak of acquaintances and just enough about their own lives to establish exactly what had long since been foreseen; that there were things which had already been finished and others which had never begun.

Then it would simply be a matter of minutes before one of them would make an excuse, which might even be true, that there was someone to meet, or a phone call expected, long distance, and they would either walk each other to the corner and separate there, or leave the restaurant together, walking in two different directions, north and south, on the same street.

But in the midst of their conversation, every now and then, they found themselves completely silent. And from the other's perspective it may have seemed at that moment that they were thinking about what had just been said or thinking of something which had happened, something which, in fact, they could only barely recollect. But more often than not, they were suddenly silent because they were watching the orange sky of the evening settle over the street, and the gentleman opening his umbrella as it started to rain. They listened to the sounds of traffic and china cups on china plates, to the young man assuring the young woman beside him, at the table adjacent

to theirs, swearing to the young woman beside him, I wasn't with her, I wasn't with anyone at all.

In some ways it's difficult for me to imagine the two of them in this café,[†] listening to strangers. Because Baader was unforgiving in so many ways and almost ruthlessly precise. They say of him that at one point he compiled statistics on the backgrounds of his colleagues.⁴ And he had an amazing collection of butterflies, which he had netted and pinned himself in large wooden cases; a collection which was very different in character from the one that appears in some Conrad story, in that regardless of the collector's accuracy and attention, the collection has never been found, as if Baader had secretly destroyed it in its entirety, specimen by specimen. And I understand that when Gardine was ill in Paris, he received a postcard from Baader dated 1920, in which he observed that "we have in German a beautiful word for genius." Perhaps it's the nature of events to accumulate in this very way.

A young girl commits suicide, telephones ring simultaneously in the cities of Munich and Zurich and New York, in the lobby of a Spanish hotel the music strikes up again as if it were the son of God returned from the clouds of heaven. I find I have to remind myself that, after all, this isn't a story about heroism, or gentleness, or even the past.

According to another version, when Helena ran into Baader by chance, the two of them stood under a powerful electric street-light for a half of an hour, breaking pieces from the pound cake she had bought in the bakery at the corner. They talked about dreams, and before returning to her apartment, they walked out of their way through the financial district (in the rain which had just begun to pour slowly down over the entire city of Berlin).

[†] There's an absence here of those sounds which have become so comforting. The ones which recall for us some sense of continuity, or situate us in relation to what little of the past hasn't escaped our attention: the ripple of the river, the sighing of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of the crowds, the faint ring of incomprehensible words cried from afar — the sounds full of mystery, desolation and sorrow. Although it's possible too that all of that which has been forgotten in our language, in our habits, is better left untried.

As they walked, Baader would gesture to the different buildings they passed, describing their interiors in every detail if Helena had never been inside. At one time, he told her, he had spent his days walking in and out of the buildings in Berlin, memorizing the craftsmanship and the arrangement of the window frames and stairs. As a child, he had spent hours at his father's desk with pencils of every color drawing maps of Berlin that were intricate, elaborate, flawless.

And though he swore to Helena that he felt more at home in this city than in any other city of the world, in Wagner Park as they stood before the small lake, shoulder to shoulder, and Baader's gaze drifted across the surface of the water, it seemed to her that he longed inexpressibly for the sea. As if, to the very brink of the horizon, he saw gigantic herds of animals moving forward methodically like the slow rivers of Africa.

He told her that while in Paris he had met a woman named Madeline on the steps of Notre Dame. He had been unfolding the schedule of a train when she approached him and asked if he had seen a little boy with a tiger cat wander by. It was a perfectly sunny day, as he remembered it, and he was almost in a rush.

Now, not a single day went by on which he didn't see the woman named Madeline, disappearing into a crowd as he descended a cathedral's steps; on which he didn't cross the street in haste, as if to follow.

The Tree of Tolstoy

There is an English doctor who can witness this, as can my wife. According to law, she has no right to testify, but I will go to court in such a way that she will have every right to.

—Vaslav Nijinsky

While visiting the coast of Portugal for several weeks in August, Nijinsky was struck for the first time by the immensity

The Tree of Tolstoy

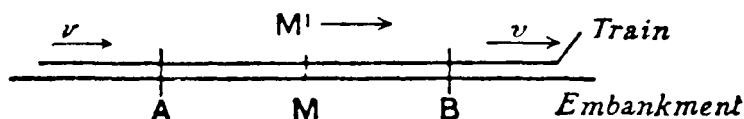


FIG. 1.

of the ocean. When he first walked in the house (which he and his wife had rented from an acquaintance in Switzerland), it reminded him of the Hôtel de Hollande on the Avenue de l'Opéra with its lofty staircase and its beautifully elaborate interior which was always so full of life. There were chandeliers and terrace windows, and two full-length mirrors which faced each other across the dining room table. So that walking through its rooms it gave the impression of being a magnificent structure of several stories high. But if you walked only fifty meters down the beach, and suddenly turned around, it seemed small and almost abandoned against the expanse of the Atlantic. Often in the evenings, when his wife went upstairs, Nijinsky would remain in the front room looking out across the water beyond the Azores as if towards the Latin or northern Americas.

In the afternoons Nijinsky wrote letters in Russian and Polish and French. After having lunch on the porch with his wife, he would close himself in the dining room, lay envelopes and paper on the wide mahogany table, and direct his attention towards his task. While he wrote, his wife would walk along the beach or read on the steps that descended to the sand and Nijinsky would become so absorbed in his work that he often wouldn't hear her if she called from outside.

Those who were familiar with Nijinsky throughout this period of his life describe him as undauntable. He apparently exhibited a sense of exuberance which was immediately evident, even to strangers who observed him either in perfor-

mance or simply across a room at a party in New York. And in contemporary interviews and recorded conversations, Nijinsky used similar terms⁹ to describe himself; in a phrase characteristic of his language at the time, he wrote in his journals, "I live today more than ever before."

But the letters written from Portugal are dominated by an entirely different tone. It's not exactly a discrepancy, it's just a matter of certain idioms and words which appear with increasing frequency and seem to represent an alternative sense of mood. *I have seen you so seldomly*, he writes to an American friend living in Europe, and to an acquaintance living in Vienna, *when I heard you had lost your brother . . . I know you were devoted to him*. In a letter addressed to a cousin who was still living outside the city of Moscow, he writes, *I have had no news from you. I have written to you but have not received any reply and my letters were returned to me*. From page to page they are straightforwardly composed, direct and fluid in their script, but over all, I can't help feeling that in style and emphasis, they seem like the letters the dancer received from his father in the years that he grew closer and closer to death.

In the mornings, when his wife walked to the market about a mile away, Nijinsky would walk through the house, absently memorizing the floor plan, opening the desk and bureau drawers as if he was looking for personal possessions inadvertently left behind. In a way, when his wife went out in the morning, the house became so apparently unfamiliar and quiet that it seemed like she would never return, and he would have to remain there forever out of loneliness, remembering her face, and walking from room to room on the second story studying the perspectives on the ocean afforded by the various windows.

In the entrance hall of the house, there was an enormous sunburst, what Jung might have described as a mandala, which was composed of alternating shades of wood, inlaid into the dark surface of the floor. The colors of the various woods, used in the design to accentuate the richness of the sun, covered an astounding range. There were the pale shades of

European pine, ebonies from the tropics, and several stripes of a deep red which could only have come from the forests of California.

To get a better sense of the role it played in the architectural organization of the entrance, Nijinsky removed all the furniture from the hall and opened the heavy front door. He took a white china bowl from the dining room table and set it carefully in the center. And before his wife came back with vegetables and fish in a canvas bag, he returned all the furniture to its place.

In describing a morning like this, there are a thousand ways to set the specific events in some kind of context—we can refer to the *yearly movement or the apparent position of the fixed stars*, and there is a spectrum of temperatures and colors, which, alluded to, will in some sense suggest the motion of the earth around the sun. But as soon as the focus of the attention shifts towards the actions of an individual, it becomes very difficult to maintain some sense of time passing, or of events taking place here and abroad; events as simple as a single cumulus passing over Trafalgar Square in London or the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin.

Imagine, for instance, a raven flying overhead in the clear European sky. It circles slowly over the ocean without a single beat of its wings, carried on the convection currents rising intermittently from the surface of the water. On the beach a small-framed woman (with the aggressive, responsive body of a ballerina) lies naked under the August sun sleeping or lazily going over the details of her entire life, while in the study of the house that overlooks the water, Nijinsky has come across, by chance, an Arabic atlas, through which he turns as if he were actually reading the delicate hieroglyphics of the East.

Or as on the train to Lisbon: in the midst of a conversation a field of flowering artichokes is suddenly framed by the window and disappears, a child opens a door and ducks sheepishly away having mistaken one compartment for another, in a station thirty miles west of Madrid as the train eases to a stop the sound is heard of a man walking along the roof of the carriage

overhead. There's simply a continuing desire to place events in the context of the world, but so little hope of success in such an attempt.

On their way to the coast, Nijinsky and his wife spent an afternoon in Madrid waiting for the Lisbon train. It was incredibly hot in the city and although it was around two in the afternoon, the streets were filled with a frenetic music as if a festival was drawing to a close.

Crossing the plaza outside the station, passing in between the women who were lingering there, Nijinsky felt as if he were crossing the stage of an unfamiliar amphitheater. And it was not just a matter of the unusually colorful clothes, but the bearing of those who were in motion, and the posture of the women standing somehow at ease in the terrible sunlight, lost in thought or in conversation, that gave them the air of actresses in the minutes following a performance.

In the shade of a courthouse there were several old men with two-wheeled carts propped on wooden boxes, selling fruit and occasionally jewelry. When the train arrived the sun was already low behind the buildings of the city, and it was hotter than ever.

There was a photograph Nijinsky had seen on the wall of a friend's apartment in Paris, of a wounded bull and a matador poised with a perfectly motionless sword. The blade of the sword was at an angle as precise as the compass work of a geometer, and the knees of both the matador and the animal were bent in the instant before action. It was the feeling of this photograph which Nijinsky sensed in the atmosphere of Madrid, and which made him reluctant to leave.⁶

In the hours shortly following dark, when it was cool, Nijinsky and his wife would have sex, and afterwards, as she fell asleep, he would run his hand down the length of her body. On the train from Lisbon he had heard from a Catholic priest that certain of the Portuguese fishermen set out in the middle of the night, and as he was lying there beside his wife, the

offshore breezes would begin to shift, the house would grow perfectly quiet and the rhythm of the waves would subside as if the ocean were suddenly at rest. And in the stillness, Nijinsky would hear them, about a mile to the south, untangling their nets and dragging their boats to the water.

While staying in that house in Portugal, Nijinsky thought a great deal of his daughter who was living with Romola's mother in Hungary. When she was only six or seven and they lived in a small chateau in Zurich, they would spend their afternoons playing games of hide and seek. And she was always somehow disappointed in being discovered so quickly. But here, there were places where she could hide and never be found.

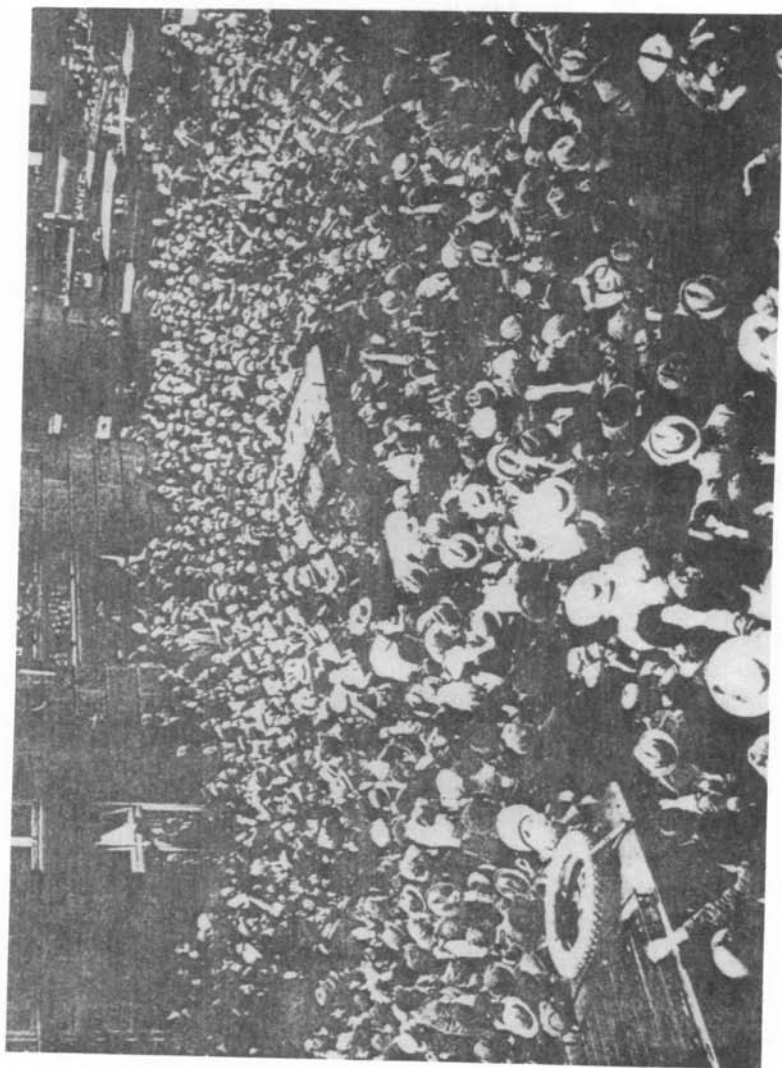
Beethoven's Sonata

The abrupt closing of a book; the lighting of a cigarette; effects offstage, a pistol shot, a cry, a fall, a crash; an effective entrance, an effective exit —

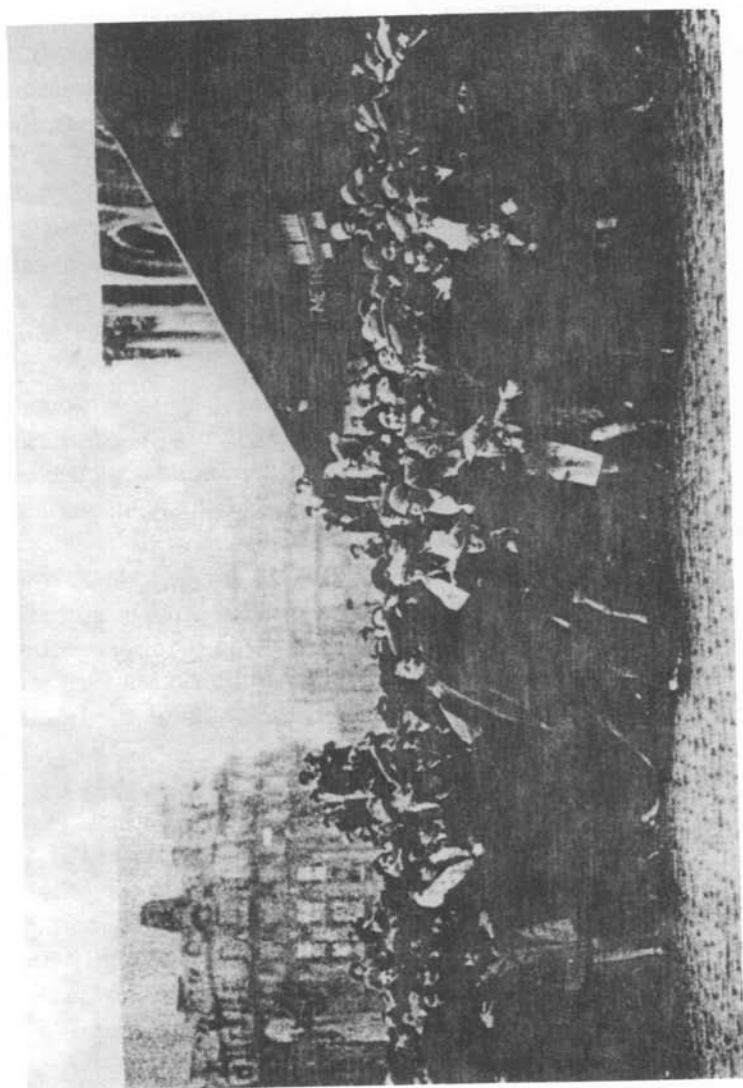
— *Charlie Chaplin*

In 1909 Charlie Chaplin went to Paris. He bought an advance ticket for an early Sunday morning, but arrived at the station late and nearly missed his train. He had to run down the platform in order to catch hold of the last luggage van, in which he rode all the way to Dover. And over the channel it rained like the end of the world.

When he arrived in the city, it was seven in the evening and the lights came on in the windows of the hotels, and at the base of the fountains near the steps of the Palais Royale. In the cafés the men and women leaned back from their tables in perfect complacency with perfect poise, as if they were gambling for money and favors, while the streets of the demi-monde remained in a tranquil darkness, and the motion of the carriages subsided under the influence of its typical music.



The abrupt closing of a book; the lighting of a cigarette; effects offstage, a pistol shot, a cry, a fall, a crash; an effective entrance, an effective exit.
—Charlie Chaplin



But for the innovation of a few motorcars, it was still the Paris of Monet, Pissarro and Renoir, if such a thing could be imagined. There was some sense of color which continued to subsume the perception of the city, organizing whatever images of splendor remained, and tracing the private worlds of the street Arabs (that were scattered haphazardly across the geography of the Left Bank) with implications of the pastoral and the endangered.

In the large outer foyer of the Folies Bergère information was discreetly solicited and professional linguists were on staff as interpreters who, if nothing else, could sketch ready phrases on the back of a postcard: "*Je vous adore,*" "*Je vous ai aimé la première fois que je vous ai vu,*" etc.

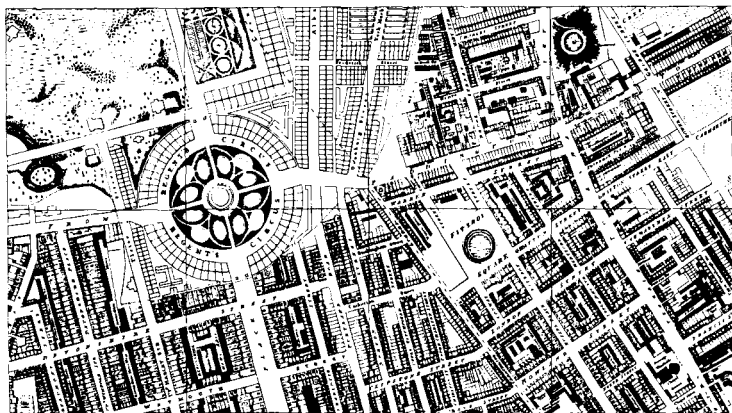
It was the year of the Steinheil scandal in which a woman was tried and found innocent of murdering her husband; the year incredible tax laws were passed in London of sixpence on the pound on personal income; the year Debussy introduced his *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune*.

There were dreams which foresaw the death of certain persons, glasses which shattered and clocks which stopped at the critical moment. And the most beautiful building in Paris was still Malmaison, where Josephine had lived and died after Napoleon divorced her.

Then after dark the gates of the Luxembourg gardens were closed. In an apartment overlooking the Champ Élysées a journalist acted with indifference and a taxi pulled to the corner of Ste. Germaine. At three o'clock in the morning a woman lit a cigarette and began turning out the lights of her studio as voices were heard singing somewhere farther down the street.

End Notes

1. Tomashevsky had studied the English language while at the university in Moscow, but the emphasis of his work had been almost entirely on the written word. As a re-



sult, his intonation and accenting were awkward, and he found the dialects of the salesmen on Portobello Road nearly incomprehensible. Standing at any one of the stalls, looking over the merchandise, and eventually buying an item, it would probably have taxed every skill that Tomashevsky had mastered in English in order to bargain. He was forced, as he later told his wife, to hit each key word and punctuate his sentences with perfect clarity; or as in his own words, he had to speak with all the precision of a man hammering a nail into a wall with exaggerated care.

2. The old Italian painting that hung opposite Franz Jung's desk was a mirror copy from the workshop of Guido Reni of an original that hangs in the Louvre. It depicts the story of David and Uriah, a story of which Jung couldn't remember a single word, even though at one point he could fluently recite verses drawn from the chapters of the Old Testament dealing specifically with the dancing king.

In mentioning this, however, I am not suggesting that such an allusion should be used as a means of accessing the presented facts. On the contrary, regardless of any archetypal similarities between the two stories, the specific details of one when set against the specific details of the other would unquestionably misrepresent the individual emphases of the separate narratives. For an archetype in itself is in no way thematic; it is empty and purely formal, nothing but a *facultas praeformandi*, a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*.

3. From a modern perspective, phrases like "a gentle twilight hovered over the wide streets flanked with tall buildings" may appear overtly mechanical, as merely artificial constructs which are manipulated to create illusions of context around the figure of Johannes Baader. But even here, in the given example, although the language superficially functions in a totally concrete and pictorial way, it is actually highly specific in its reference to events both from the contemporary political life of Berlin and from the life (real or imagined) of Baader himself.

Indeed (apropos of the example), Johannes Baader well recognized the pivotal role of architecture as an axis in the reformulation of urban culture and accepted it as the conceptual prerequisite for virtually any dimension of cultural activity (theology, philosophy, science, etc.).

4. During this period it becomes very difficult to gauge the accuracy of the depictions of various events in the press. Many of the articles were grounded in hearsay and a general lack of evidence, which obviously problematizes attempts at locating one's sympathies in relation to Baader. In a Munich newspaper of May 8, for instance, it was reported that on the day of the Weimar assembly Baader arranged processions of children with dances and songs around the statues of Goethe and Schiller.

5. Nijinsky's daughter was named Kyra (an old Byzantine name which Nijinsky gave her because of his love for Greece). Shortly after she was born, Nijinsky wrote her a cradle song, a lullaby, which is hauntingly beautiful, but of which, unfortunately, no translation is really possible.

6. In the process of forming a coherent impression of an experience, such as Nijinsky's in Madrid, it's almost always true that an awareness of marginal information (what Boris Tomashevsky referred to as the "assimilation of seemingly incidental remarks") plays a greater role than one could imagine or even trace. Though sometimes we may experience emotions of regret when outlining a certain event whose general ramifications we do not yet understand. When Charlie Chaplin returned to Paris, for instance, over forty years after seeing it for the first time, he was refused reentry into America.

If only the story of Boris's marriage to Emily had been a love story, there would have been so many things to tell. There would have been moonlit nights and secret words and the singing of a gypsy chorus heard from a restaurant door.

A Long Game of Scrabble: A Memoir of Graham Greene

Michael Meyer

I saw a good deal of Graham Greene in the late forties and fifties. Once he mentioned that he was writing a film script. He told me the plot and it sounded pretty boring. I wondered who would want to see it. It turned out to be *The Third Man*. Graham's account of it ranks with Orwell's of *Animal Farm* as the most inadequate *précis* of a work by its author that I have heard or can imagine.

Graham was a great practical joker. Once he heard that Cyril Connolly was giving a party to which he felt he should have been invited, and telephoned Connolly in the middle of it saying in an assumed accent that he was their chimney sweep and would be coming first thing next morning, so would Mr. Connolly please have the dustcovers over all the furniture? The impersonation proved successful, for Connolly, after vainly pleading that the sweep should postpone his visit, obeyed, which must have been a tedious chore in the small hours after the last guest had gone.

Graham also invented a terrible game, usually played around midnight or later. Each of you opened the telephone directory at random, picked a name blindly and rang the number; the winner was whoever kept his or her victim talking the longest. Graham always won. He told me that he had discovered another Graham Greene, a retired solicitor in Golders Green. The first conversation between them went something as follows: "Are you Graham Greene?" "My name is Graham Greene, but—" "Are you the man who writes these filthy novels?" "No, I am a retired solicitor." "I'm not surprised you're ashamed to confess you're the author of this muck." "No, really, I assure you—" "If I'd written them at least I'd have the guts to admit it, etc." Graham told me that he had made several such calls using different accents, and that in the end the unfortunate man removed his name and number from the directory. He also kept other people's visiting cards, which he would use for a variety of harmless purposes, such as sending them across restaurants to friends who had not spotted him, with cryptic and sometimes obscene invitations written on them. This was the bright side of his temperament. I glimpsed the other side only a few times during these years, but I remember asking Edward Sackville-West, an old friend of his, what he thought Graham would be writing in twenty years, and nodding in agreement as Eddie replied, "Oh, Graham will have committed suicide by then." "The fifties were for me a period of great happiness and great torment," Graham wrote in *Ways of Escape*. "Manic depression reached its height in that decade."

I had seen him fairly often in England without getting really close to him until, in November 1955, he passed through Stockholm on his way to Poland. His Swedish publisher, Ragnar Svanström, gave a dinner for him to which I was invited, and towards the end of the evening Graham asked if I would join him and the Svanströms as his guest for dinner the following evening. I explained that I had a date, but he said, "Bring the girl," adding, "Perhaps you could bring one for me." Immediately he added, "No, I was joking," but it seemed a good idea. I pondered, and thought of Anita Björk.

I had come to know Anita and her husband Stig Dagerman two years earlier, having met them at a party at Ragnar Svanström's house in the skerries, and during the summer of 1953 had been a frequent visitor at their house in Enebyberg, a few miles north of Stockholm. Stig was the best writer of his generation in Sweden, and one of the best in Europe, the author of two brilliant plays, *The Man Condemned to Death* and *The Shadow of Mart*, and of several fine novels and short stories. Anita was a beautiful and gifted actress who had become internationally famous through her performance in the title role of Alf Sjöberg's film, *Miss Julie*; as a result, she was offered a Hollywood contract, but the moguls were alarmed when she arrived with Stig, to whom she was not yet married. The head of the studio, no paragon himself, begged her to marry Stig, explaining in a deathless phrase: "We can't have immorality in Hollywood." Anita replied that neither of them wished to marry and, on being told that under these circumstances the studio could not employ her, packed her bags and returned with Stig to Sweden. But a year later, in that summer of 1953, having by then produced a daughter, they decided they would after all marry. I was a guest at the wedding feast, at the end of which they pronounced me unfit to drive home. I protested that I could not occupy the guest room on their wedding night, but they overruled me and together made up my bed before retiring into the bridal chamber. The three of us had many splendid evenings that summer. We would talk about literature and the theater until the sun rose around two o'clock. Then Anita would go to bed, and Stig and I would abandon these subjects for our greater love, football, which we would discuss for another hour or two before sleep finally overcame us.

But about eighteen months later Stig was found dead in his garage with the car engine running. None of us was sure whether he had intended to kill himself. He was a manic depressive, and had several times attempted suicide, but always, except on this occasion, ended by turning off the engine and walking out into the night air. His death had occurred twelve months before Graham's visit to Stockholm. I had seen

Anita once or twice since. She was lonely and depressed, and I thought it might cheer her to come out, if she could be persuaded. Ragnar and I phoned her and she agreed. When we told Graham, he became embarrassed and said: "I didn't mean it seriously. I hate blind dates; they're always a disappointment." He recalled that he had met her and Stig at the Stockholm premiere of his play, *The Living Room*, the opening performance of which had to be delayed because Graham and the director of the Dramatic Theatre got stuck in a lift. He seemed to remember Stig more vividly than he did Anita, and mentioned that he had particularly liked him, but said nothing about her.

The six of us dined pleasantly the next evening, 12 November 1955, at Djurgårdsbrunnsvärdshus, a lovely old restaurant set in the great park of Djurgården. Around 11 P.M., the Svanströms retired and my girlfriend and I invited Graham and Anita back to my one-room flat on Vallhallavägen. As we went into the kitchen to make coffee, I turned to say something and noticed the way Graham and Anita were looking at each other as they talked on the sofa. "Do you think there's something starting between those two?" I said, and she replied, "I was wondering." Nothing happened that evening, but when I returned to London for Christmas Anita flew with me, and on the day of her arrival an affair began between her and Graham which was to last, with considerable intensity on both sides, for nearly four years.

Graham has not had many affairs, as he once pointed out to me, contrasting what he proudly regarded as his restraint in this field with my own somewhat frivolous attitude. As far as I can recall, he has had only four affairs in all the years I have known him, none of them casual.

He came often to Sweden during those four years. I would meet him at Bromma airport and drive him to the house at Enebyberg which I knew so well. But that house held memories for Anita, and soon she moved to Saltsjö-Duvnäs on the other, southern side of Stockholm. Since Anita was usually acting in the evenings and sometimes filming in the day too, I saw much more of Graham in these years than ever before,

and it was now that I first became intimate with him in the sense that he spoke about himself as he had not done previously with me. We would wander round Stockholm, whose atmosphere he had caught uncannily in *England Made Me* twenty years before, on the strength of a two weeks' visit. We dined and went to cinemas (seldom, if ever, to theaters, since he could not understand more than a few words of Swedish), then came back to my new flat on Döbelnsgatan with its two balconies high above the city and drank and talked until it was time for him to collect Anita at the stage-door of Dramaten as, half a century earlier, August Strindberg had waited for his third wife, the actress Harriet Bosse, who was thirty years his junior. There were only twenty years between Graham and Anita. I wish now that I had kept a diary instead of just an engagement book, but I have always shrunk from it, as from carrying a camera; I think it was Thomas Hardy who said that he once tried taking a notebook round in his pocket but gave it up because he found it paralyzed his powers of observation.

I remember asking Graham how he could be a Roman Catholic since the dogmas of that religion seemed in so many respects contrary to his temperament, especially as regards extramarital sex.

He said, "When you were a schoolboy, did you go through a religious phase?"

"Yes."

"Did you believe that flames of Hell were beneath the floorboards waiting to swallow you up?"

"Yes."

"Did you like that feeling?"

"Of course not."

"Did you get out of feeling like that?"

"Yes."

"Some of us never get out of it." A pause, then, "I wouldn't recommend anyone to be a Catholic unless they have to be." On another occasion, he said: "Never forget how lucky you are in two respects. You like people unless you've a reason to dislike them, and you're happy unless you've a reason to be unhappy. I'm the opposite."

His Catholicism made it impossible for him to divorce and remarry, but he tried earnestly to persuade Anita to come and live with him in either England or France. She was fluent in both English and French, and could, at thirty-two, have continued her film career, and perhaps her theater career too, in either country. But unlike so many Swedes, especially those in her profession, she was unwilling to emigrate. In addition to her daughter by Stig, then three, she had a young son by a previous marriage, and she said she wanted to bring them up in Sweden as Swedes. Moreover, she felt deeply rooted there herself; following the success of *Miss Julie*, she had had several opportunities to pursue an international career apart from the Hollywood fiasco, but had refused them. Perhaps the Hollywood experience had made her unwilling to submit herself to the whims of foreign producers. I am sure she was as much in love with Graham as he was with her. He considered emigrating to Sweden, but he found the long, dark winters oppressive, and felt he was too old at fifty to learn a new and completely strange language. (He is not a facile linguist, although later he managed to build sufficiently on his school French to get by when he went to live in Antibes. Despite the amount of time that he spent in various South American countries, he never acquired more than a rudimentary smattering of Spanish.) He also disliked the long evenings alone when Anita was at the theater; apart from the Svanströms and myself, he had no friends in Sweden. Had she devoted herself mainly to films, as she would have done in England or France, they would have had the evenings together.

"Unendingly grateful for the way you rally round," Graham wrote on a Christmas card to me at the end of 1956. I performed occasional errands for him, such as sending Anita roses on her first nights with notes attached which he posted to me. His inscriptions to me in various books refer to my role in launching the affair. "To Michael, to whom I am grateful for a reason." "In memory of an evening in Nov. 1955 when I was so angry with you" (for arranging the blind date, before things turned out as they did). "Remember many drinks and many problems in Stockholm."

When I returned from the Far East in the summer of 1958, Graham Greene suggested that I should accompany him to Cuba, then still under the Batista dictatorship. He needed to go there to plan the filmscript of *Our Man in Havana*. But I had had enough travel for a while and refused, a decision that I have often regretted. "I enjoyed the louche atmosphere of Batista's city," he was to confess in *Ways of Escape*, "... the brothel life, the roulette in every hotel ... the Shanghai Theatre where for one dollar twenty-five cents one could see a nude cabaret of extreme obscenity with the bluest of blue films in the intervals."

Things were not going so well between him and Anita. I see from my engagement book that I met him in Stockholm at the end of August, and it must have been then that he wrote in my copy of his play *The Potting Shed*, published that year, "On what could be a sad occasion—the last *smörgåsbord*." On 24 October he wrote from London:

Just got back three hours ago from Havana . . . I'm very tired and a bit depressed. I find after all these weeks that I'm just as much in love with Anita as ever—can't get her out of my system. Give me news of her. I wish to God that she'd live half her time here—then I could stand half in Sweden, but I'm afraid the affair's gone flat for her. Well, I'll have to console myself with the South Seas.

This last was a reference to a plan he had begun to hatch for us to go together to Tahiti.

Tahiti figures in several of his dedications to me from that time: "In the hope that it will produce Tahiti, this damp squib" (*Our Man in Havana*); "After three schnapps, and in hope of Tahiti" (*The Living Room*). I remember the *Living Room* lunch well, for it almost landed me in jail. We ate at Stallmästaregården on the northern outskirts of Stockholm, and each of our three schnapps measured six centiliters, so that when I drove him back I had almost a fifth of a liter of the stuff inside me. I still had my first car then, a green Sunbeam Talbot which fell to pieces later that year, and after I had

dropped him my engine stalled on a busy roundabout in front of the Royal Theatre. Two policemen approached. The laws on drunken driving are very strict in Sweden, and the length of time spent by an offender in prison corresponds to the amount of alcohol in his or her blood. When I cautiously explained my mechanical problem to them, (in English, for I hoped that any slight slurring might thus be less obvious), they ordered me to telephone a garage. Reluctant to leave the car and try to walk to a kiosk, I said, "How can I leave the car in a middle of the roundabout?" They accepted the logic of this, and together pushed my car, with me at the wheel, to the side of the road, then mercifully strode off while I pretended to be looking up a telephone number. There cannot be many a motorist who has had two Swedish policemen push his car while he steered with nearly half a pint of aquavit inside him.

On 15 November, Graham wrote me another depressed letter about Anita.

She doesn't even acknowledge . . . the play [*The Complaisant Lover*, which he had recently completed]. A strange girl. I won't ring up in case a stranger is now installed, and I don't feel I can write again. I write very warmly and was quite prepared to work out an arrangement, but I can't *pester* the girl. If you see or write to her, you can indicate that she's still, unfortunately, in the bloodstream and I'm quite unable to look for a successor. If only she'd take a week's holiday in London, but I expect she's found a satisfactory successor. Anyway she's one of the nicest people I've ever met, and my only regret is losing her.

A short time later (the letter is uncharacteristically undated), he wrote to tell me that Anita had finally broken things off. "No more actresses and no more Swedes . . . Don't worry about the South Seas. It may not be possible for me, as I have to fit in leper colonies in the Belgian Congo before rehearsals of the new play. Script finished today [of the film *Our Man in Havana*]. I dread the finish as now there's nothing to do but brood. Why can't one fall out of love as easily as one falls into it?" On the back of the envelope he wrote, "Petulant tone due to painful liver."

Greene's play, *The Complaisant Lover*, directed by John Gielgud with a cast headed by Ralph Richardson and Paul Scofield, opened at the Royal Court Theatre in Liverpool on 11 June 1959 for a short tour before coming to London. That happened to be my thirty-eighth birthday, and Graham invited me to travel up with him for the first night, promising me as an additional present a bottle of Cheval Blanc 1950 (a wine mentioned in the play) to accompany our lunch on the train. As we waited on the platform at Euston station, Graham clutching the precious bottle, John Gielgud and the formidable impresario Binkie Beaumont, who was presenting the play, appeared. "Oh dear," said Graham. "We don't want them to join us. This bottle won't do for four." I had never met Beaumont or, except momentarily, Gielgud, and would happily have forgone my share of the wine in exchange for three hours of their company. But Graham, after introducing me to them, said: "I'm afraid we can't join you for lunch. It's Michael's birthday and I've promised him this wine and there isn't enough for four." Beaumont and Gielgud both gave me a look. So Graham and I drank the wine, an incongruous accompaniment to one of British Rail's nastier lunches ("choosing to forget," as he had written a quarter of century earlier in *Stamboul Train*, "that a train reduces all wine to a common mediocrity"), watched by Beaumont and Gielgud, both considerable connoisseurs, from another table, and arrived in Liverpool slightly tight, having also consumed a good deal of whisky.

It was a strange evening. At the theater, Graham and I sat next to an imperious American lady named Mrs. Irene Selznick, who had bought the Broadway rights. She was not only the wife of the producer David O. Selznick but the daughter of Louis B. Mayer, two of the wealthiest men in Hollywood, and was in a bad temper because, she asserted, Binkie Beaumont had not met her at the airport. Beaumont himself and Gielgud had prudently seated themselves elsewhere. As we took our places, Sir Malcolm Sargent greeted Graham effusively from the row behind us. Graham shook his hand without enthusiasm, turned to me and said quite loudly: "Dreadful man.

Flash Harry. I can't stand him." After the final curtain, he asked me if I would take Mrs. Selznick back to the Adelphi Hotel where we were staying and look after her while he went round with Gielgud and Beaumont to see the actors, presumably wishing to exclude her from the discussion that was about to take place. This did not please Mrs. Selznick, whose humor was worsened when Sargent, having accompanied her and me to the exit, then made his excuses on the ground that he had to go backstage to greet his friends in the cast. Mrs. Selznick was furious. "That," she informed me, "is what we call the brush." I tried to assure her that nothing could have been further from Sir Malcolm's mind, but she commanded: "Take me back to the hotel. I need a drink."

The prospect of entertaining Mrs. Selznick for what might well be the best part of an hour in the bar of the notoriously expensive Adelphi Hotel worried me. Apart from all else, I had not much money left, having felt bound to pay for our numerous whiskies on the train in gratitude for the Cheval Blanc, and Mrs. Selznick looked prepared to consume a good deal. But worse was to come. After rapidly downing several drinks, she said: "I am ravenous. Thanks to your Mr. Beaumont I have had no lunch. Let's eat." Having been on the receiving end of several looks from Mr. Beaumont earlier that day, I suggested that we ought perhaps to wait for our host, but Mrs. Selznick rose and strode into the dining room, where the first sight to meet our eyes was Sir Malcolm Sargent seated alone at a table with a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket. "That man!" cried Mrs. Selznick. "I refuse to eat in the same room as him." I explained that I did not think the management could well ask him to leave, especially since he was almost certainly staying in the hotel, and pointed out a table for eight, fortunately at the far end of the room, which looked as though it might be for our party and proved to be so. She seated herself, perused the menu, and was about to order when, not a moment too soon, Binkie Beaumont arrived, with Graham, Gielgud, Ralph Richardson and his wife Mu, and Paul Scofield.

It was daunting company for an unknown author to find

himself in. I had met Richardson once or twice at the Savile Club but did not know him, he plainly could not remember having met me, and I knew none of the others except Graham, apart from my unfortunate encounter with Beaumont and Gielgud. It was by now approaching midnight and the kitchen was about to close. Everyone forwent starters and quickly chose a main dish except Richardson who, professing himself ignorant of French, in which the menu was printed, demanded a full explanation of various dishes, posing many a supplementary question ("Wild mushrooms? You actually send chaps out into the fields of Liverpool to gather them? Do they have to go at night?") Eventually he decided that he did not like anything described and asked if he could have scrambled eggs and sausages, which were not on the menu but which they agreed to provide.

Richardson then talked enthusiastically about cars and airplanes, which none of the rest of us knew anything about. "Oh, Johnny, did you read in the paper about that fellow Campbell? Isn't it wonderful?" "Campbell, Campbell. Ralph, I can't recall an actor of that name." "No, no, no, Donald Campbell." Gielgud and the rest of us looked blank. "Ah, come on, Johnny, you know. The fellow who's just beaten the world's speed record." "Oh, Ralph," said Gielgud. "I do so admire you. You know about the most extraordinary things, machines of all kinds and animals and everything. I don't understand anything in the newspaper except the theater page, I turn straight to that and that's all I can understand."

After dinner, we went into the lounge for coffee. Lady Richardson retired; then Richardson said: "I must take Ambrose [or some such name] for a walk. Without fresh air he can't sleep." Whether Ambrose was a child or, as seemed more probable, a dog, none of us knew. Ralph then went upstairs and reappeared in a hat, alone as before, saying: "Here we are. I'll just take him around the block." It was like the play *Harvey*, in which the chief character supposes himself to be accompanied everywhere by a rabbit which no one else can see. Someone was brave enough to ask, "Where is Ambrose?" "Haven't you met him?" said Ralph, and drew from an inside

pocket a tiny hamster, which he then carried out into the night.

The Complaisant Lover proved a triumph, and rightly so, on Broadway as well as in London; Mrs. Selznick's ordeal had been worthwhile. None of us could have foreseen that it would be Graham's last success in the theater. He inscribed the copy he gave me, "In memory of Liverpool."

I did not think we would ever get to the South Seas; Graham always seemed committed to dashing off somewhere else. "I can see now," he was to write later, "that my travels, as much as the act of writing, were ways of escape," and he quoted Auden: "Man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep." But that autumn of 1959 he began to make plans for our journey, and on 20 December we set off from Heathrow. We traveled first class; I think my ticket, right round the globe, cost about £650. Graham had apologized for not being able to leave earlier, saying in his defense, "We don't need to waste time in Singapore and Bangkok and such places"—rather a blasé observation, I thought, for I would have loved to revisit them in his company, and also to see a little of Australia, where I had never been. But no; we had to be in Tahiti by Christmas. The only place *en route* where I managed to persuade him to leave the airport was Sydney, where we had a couple of hours to spare, ate a fine lobster lunch at the Rex Hotel in King's Cross, and took a taxi ride around the city, admiring the wooden trams and the Victorian wrought-iron balconies. We drove past the cricket ground, at which Graham stared glumly, expressing his relief that there was no match being played which I might have bullied him into watching for a few overs. I am still embarrassed when Australians ask me if I have been to their country and I have to reply, "For three hours." (We had also had an hour at Darwin airport, watching the sun rise.)

Graham had an idea that we might recoup much of the difference between our fares and that for tourist class by our consumption of free drinks, and from the time we left Heathrow he kept a note of all we had, calculating what each drink would have cost had we had to pay for it. But although we availed ourselves of every offer, the resultant sum mounted

so slowly that he stopped keeping a record after we left Jakarta. The first night we spent out of the plane was at Fiji, where we admired the landscape as we drove into the capital, Suva ("Tahiti'll have to be good to be more beautiful than this," he remarked), but spent a dull evening. A young American in the hotel, recognizing Graham and evidently unaware of his tastes, took us for a gay couple and attempted to strike up an intimacy, explaining that he was a friend of Terence Rattigan, a writer whose work Graham particularly disliked; nor did he much like Rattigan as a man. Graham once said to me that he thought talking to Rattigan was like walking on very slippery parquet flooring. I thought this an unfair judgment, since Rattigan had been kind and helpful to me in my early days, although he knew I was not of his persuasion.

We had a five-hour delay at the airport, waiting for the waves to subside sufficiently for the seaplane to take off, but at last we left and, after a brief stopover in the Cook Islands, arrived in Tahiti, Graham's promised land. Neither of us liked Papeete, the capital, a squalid and dreary little town like the nastiest section of the Marseilles waterfront plonked down in the tropics. We stayed at first in a smart-looking hotel which turned out to be infested with rats. But fortunately we made the acquaintance of a splendid Swede, Bengt Danielsson, and his attractive French wife Marie Thérèse. Danielsson, a bald and bearded giant in his late thirties, had been a member of Thor Heyerdahl's Kon Tiki expedition, the only Swede among those Norwegians; a professional anthropologist, he had settled in Tahiti and knew it and the other South Sea Islands better than any native, being fluent in several of the local languages as well as in half a dozen European tongues. He found us a bungalow on the shore ten miles outside Papeete which Marlon Brando had occupied during the filming of *Mutiny on the Bounty* a few years previously, and a cook and a maid to look after us. As we drove out to inspect it, Graham said: "I hope it's more than a mile from the nearest Catholic church." "Why?" "If it's further than a mile we are excused from attending." He didn't drive a car, though he had done so in Africa during the war. I said, "I can drive you to within a mile and

you can walk the rest." To his relief, it was more than a mile, and although I several times repeated my offer he never availed himself of it.

We both found Tahiti disappointing—not particularly beautiful, even outside the capital, and much less attractive than Fiji—and stuffed with French *fonctionnaires* and rich French and American dropouts. The native girls were mostly ugly—as I suppose we might have expected if we had studied Gauguin's paintings more closely—lived in equally ugly huts of planks and corrugated iron, and rode around on motorcycles. They also had very bad teeth, the result, Danielsson told us, of living largely on tinned food brought in by American ships. Graham wondered how they could have earned the reputation of being beautiful, and decided it must have been because until the coming of steam the island lay six weeks' sail from the nearest mainland, so that after much celibacy even the Tahitian girls must have seemed desirable. We were invited to a series of dull parties, all with the same guests and the same servants (the guests brought theirs along to help), and the same uninteresting food. The Danielssons were our only refuge. But perhaps the dullness helped Graham, for the block which he had encountered on his new novel, *A Burnt Out Case*, now dissolved, and he made good progress.

He kept to a strict routine. He rose each morning at 6:45 and, after breakfast, sat down at the window seat at one end of the veranda with a wad of paper on his knees, large double sheets of lined foolscap. "I have a passion for writing on clean, single-lined foolscap," says Bendrix, the protagonist of *The End of the Affair*; "A smear, a tea-mark on a page, makes it unusable." And, like Bendrix, Graham made a mark every hundred words to "help calculate the weight I have given to a scene" (as he was to confess in a broadcast on his eightieth birthday). A decade after Tahiti, when he began *Travels with My Aunt*, he changed to plain paper because he felt "imprisoned" by the lines. He wrote in longhand with a fine pen in a very small, almost illegible script, for two hours each day—no more, no less. In those two hours he would write seven to nine hundred words, the equivalent of two to three printed

pages. (In *Ways of Escape* he refers to his "usual stint of 500 words" per day on *The Power and the Glory*, but that was in the afternoons after writing 200 words each morning on *The Confidential Agent*; and a complaint he had made to me earlier that year from Jamaica that he could manage "only 500 words per day" confirms that he expected a larger daily output at this time.) At 9 A.M. he would stop. This was when I got up, and as I walked along the veranda to the shower room he would look up and say, somewhat complacently I felt, "Nine hundred words this morning," or, even worse, "Finished my words for the day"—a depressing remark with which to be greeted when I hadn't yet begun and the thermometer was climbing towards ninety. He said he liked to stop writing when it was going well rather than continue until he dried, because that made it easier to start next day. Then he spent the rest of the morning reading—mostly history, with an occasional novel or thriller, such as Rex Stout—while I struggled at my end of the veranda trying to translate Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* (and, later, Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*), incongruous texts in the sweltering heat with the Pacific twenty feet away. Last thing at night, Graham always read through what he had written during the morning so that it would be fresh on his mind when he started again next day. He said he liked to let the unconscious work on it while he was asleep.

During our month on Tahiti, he wrote about a quarter of *A Burnt Out Case*. He seldom spoke about it, and I didn't question him; he once told me that talking about a book he was working on dissipated the excitement of private communication between pen and paper. In any case, I have always found that when he did say anything about a work, either in-progress or just-completed, he usually gave a largely false idea of what the book, or play, was about (as with *The Third Man*). But that is true of most good authors of my acquaintance; bad ones are often better at summarizing their books than writing them.

One afternoon when we were driving around the island in a fearfully battered little Citroën we had hired—the windows wouldn't open, a great disadvantage in the tropics, and just

before we left the brakes broke, luckily in someone's gravel drive and not on a curve by the cliffs—he told me that *A Burnt Out Case* was the most pessimistic novel he had ever written and that he feared it was gloomy and would bore people, a prognostication which proved quite incorrect. He also told me that he was finding it much more difficult to write novels now than twenty years ago, but there is no internal evidence of this any more than in his subsequent novels, though the extra difficulty continued. But this again is a common characteristic among authors: as they grow older, they know more about the technique of writing but become more exacting, tougher in their demands on themselves, less willing to throw a new handful of characters on the fire, as someone said of Dickens, or to digress into comedy or descriptive narrative that is not integral to the plot.

Once he got stuck on a point of plot. We were swimming, or rather floating on the surface, watching through glass masks the tiny multi-colored tropical fish moving in and out of the equally multi-colored masses of coral that lay on the seabed in huge rough lumps that cut your leg open if you grazed against them, and when we stopped for breath, he said, "Why should a man who is absolutely dead inside, with no desire for religion or beauty or women or anything, travel several hundred miles down a river to see a girl he doesn't particularly want to see?" There had to be this meeting between them—it leads up to the crisis of the book—and it had to be in the town, not in the leper hospital where the man was living. Why should he go there? "To see a doctor?" I suggested. No, there were doctors in the hospital where he was. It was a problem and we stood there in the blue water with our masks pushed up onto our foreheads like motorcyclists' goggles, trying to think of a motive. I suggested that he might have a toothache and have to visit a dentist, but Graham said he had had too many dentists in his novels and plays—a dentist had been the chief character in *The Complaisant Lover*, there had been another in *The Power and the Glory*—everywhere he went, he said, he met dentists (his travel book, *The Lawless Roads*, is full of them, and even on Tahiti our first guide before we met

the Danielssons had been one), and he didn't want to introduce another into *A Burnt Out Case*, least of all as motivation for the main crisis. In the end he solved it very naturally; the trip downriver is such an integral part of the plot that it seems impossible that it could ever have presented any problem of motivation.

We played Scrabble regularly. Graham had brought a board with him, and we had begun while waiting for takeoff at Heathrow. We had played on the aircraft, in the airports at Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta and Darwin, on Fiji. . . . To my surprise, he was not very good at it. He dislikes crosswords and perhaps the two go together. He even, dare I say it, occasionally misspelt a word ("awry" was one, though I cannot remember how he thought it should be). We had made the mistake of not bringing an English dictionary with us, and Tahiti being French, there was none on the island, or anyway none that we managed to find. Occasionally Graham would come up with some improbable word, usually containing a *z* or a *q*, the highest-scoring letters in Scrabble, claiming that it was an Elizabethan obscenity ("zeb") or the like and swearing that he would prove it from his fifteen-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* when he returned to Albany. Even with such devious strategies, he hardly ever managed to win.

Sometimes these games led to angry exchanges. It was always oppressively hot and humid in the middle of the day, and we had little to do except read and swim. One afternoon he claimed "quoign," which he said was a building term, though he was not sure precisely what. It would have been an important coup for Graham had I allowed it, for it placed the *q* on a treble space, worth thirty points. When I queried it, Graham triumphantly quoted what he claimed to be a line from *Macbeth*. "Yon castle's quoign doth Duncan's spirit haunt" or something of the sort, and when I said this didn't sound like a Shakespeare line to me, he retorted, "I know I am right, because when I was at school I learned the whole of *Macbeth* by heart." "Really?" I asked, and he said, "Yes, from the first line, 'So fair and foul a day I have not seen,' to the last, 'Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone.'" I said, "That doesn't

impress me. The first line of *Macbeth* is 'When shall we three meet again?' " "No, that's the second scene. The play begins with Macbeth and Banquo walking across the blasted heath." "No, the witches." Our argument became so heated that we resolved to drive off at once to find a Shakespeare, but that proved as elusive as an English dictionary. None of the French in our neighborhood possessed one. Eventually we made the longer journey to the Danielssons, who had one indeed, but only an American paperback unpromisingly entitled *Everything Shakespeare Ever Wrote*, with modernized spelling. We looked up *Macbeth*, and I was proved right about the opening scene, which annoyed Graham; then he tracked down his line, which was not by any means as he had quoted it but did contain the word in the sense of which he had spoken, but spelt "coin." This, he said, was clearly a modernization. Eventually we agreed to hold the score for that game (we were playing Aggregate Scrabble, the winner being he who had scored most points, not won most games, when we got back to London), and the matter was held in abeyance until we reached San Francisco several weeks later.

He told me proudly that he had given up sugar in tea and coffee so as to lose weight, and produced a little tin of tablets which he shook into these beverages instead. However, in the middle of each morning he would drink a large Planter's Punch, the rum in which must have been the equivalent of many lumps of sugar.

Graham was content on Tahiti because his novel was going well. I was restless. The proofs of my first four Ibsen translations would be due from Doubleday and Hart-Davis sometime in the late winter or early spring, I didn't know when, and I fretted at the thought that I might return late for them and so give my rival in Newcastle the chance to publish ahead of me. Moreover, now that I had finished both *The Ghost Sonata* and *The Wild Duck* I found myself with no more work to do on Tahiti. Sometime that January I asked Graham if he would mind my leaving in two or three weeks, and this led to one of the very few rows we ever had; his book was going well and he wanted to stay. He said, in effect, "Yes, go. I'll be

happier alone." But this mood of his did not last, and at the end of January we left Tahiti together.

On one of our last nights, we managed to find someone who could provide us with opium. He was a French doctor, small and wizened, looking remarkably like the Graham Sutherland portrait of Somerset Maugham. We went to his house with the Danielssons, neither of whom had smoked opium before. The doctor greeted us in a long flowered robe. Somewhat to my satisfaction, Graham drew either too slowly or too fast on his first pipe, so that it went out prematurely, while I managed mine in a single deep inhalation. "*Bien, monsieur, bien,*" said the doctor, "*Vous avez la disposition*"—about the only time I have ever been praised for anything in French. Sadly, I remember nothing else of that evening, as is often the way with opium. It was the second and last time I smoked it, an agreeable experience which left no hangover, but one which I have never had any particular desire to repeat.

We spent a couple of hours on the island of Bora Bora between planes, and wished we could have had longer there. After another night in Fiji we flew on to San Francisco. It was my first visit to the States, and Graham's first to San Francisco. He liked it greatly, as I did; this, he said, was a city he wouldn't mind living in. We arrived in the evening, and the first thing we did next morning was to find a second-hand bookshop to check up on "quoign." It turned out to have a *q*, which pleased him, but not a *g* and this was important because it meant that the *q* would not have been on the treble space. Graham refused to accept this and insisted that the matter be held in further abeyance until he could check in his larger dictionary in London (which, however, gave no authority for the *g*).

He had various acquaintances in San Francisco, who invited us to a series of expensive restaurants where the menus read dazzlingly and the food arrived looking wonderful but tasting of nothing at all. After three or four such meals, we wondered if we had lost our sense of taste in the South Seas; but one lunchtime, needing a quick bite before going to a vineyard run by monks, we joined a queue at a self-service eatery in Union Square called Lefty O'Douls (after a baseball star),

where we ate, for practically nothing, the best meal we had had since our lobsters in Sydney. Unfortunately, we had to return hospitality to all the people who had entertained us, and could not very well ask them to queue with us at Lefty O'Doul's, so we had to give them expensive and tasteless meals like the ones they had given us. But on the two or three other occasions on which we found ourselves alone, we made a bee-line for Lefty's. I wonder if it still exists?

We spent six happy days in San Francisco. Then Graham's daughter Lucy, who was living in Canada, arrived in a two-ton Chevrolet truck to drive us eastwards. We crossed the Sierra Nevada mountains and the spectacular Nevada landscape until we saw a hideous plastic arch straddling the highway, bearing the message: WELCOME TO RENO. THE GREATEST LITTLE CITY IN THE WORLD. Here we were to spend the night. We reconnoitred the city. Three out of every four establishments seemed to be gambling-booths; the fourth was usually a chemist's. We decided to spend what remained of the afternoon on the fruit-machines, and were puzzled by a large notice which read: NO INDIVIDUAL IS PERMITTED TO OPERATE MORE THAN TWO MACHINES SIMULTANEOUSLY. "Surely you mean one?" Graham asked of a gigantic attendant, who replied: "No, two's O.K." We looked around and saw a number of people doing just that, working one machine right-handed and the other left-handed. The attendant, surprised at our naiveté, explained that many people lacked the patience to wait for the wheels to come to rest and so operated two machines in tandem. The place was unbearably hot, and Graham noticed that several of the customers were wearing gloves. The attendant again pitied our ignorance: "After three or four hours, your hands begin to bleed." We enjoyed amazing luck, for I won a jackpot and Graham two. Our hotel, naturally, contained a casino, and as we passed through it on our way to an early bed (we had to rise at 6 A.M. to make Salt Lake City before dark), the scene resembled something from a Hollywood western, with handsome blondes dispensing the chips to men clutching rolls of dollar bills. Eight hours later, when we left, the scene was the same, except that the men's

faces were covered with stubble, the rolls were smaller and the blondes haggard. Next morning, in Salt Lake City, we parted, Graham driving on with Lucy to Canada and I flying to New York.

Such was our round-the-world trip. Looking back on it, what astonishes me is how seldom we quarrelled, considering the pressure on two people of being together for two months, especially two natural loners in unfamiliar surroundings and, for most of the time, in tropical heat. Perhaps the fact that we were loners helped; neither of us demanded attention or conversation. If I have dwelt on the lighter moments, it is not because we had no serious conversations, simply that when two people have known each other for years one conversation tends to be rather like another. No doubt we held many discussions about literature, a few on politics and none or almost none on religion. I remember asking about Evelyn Waugh, whom, alas, I never met, and Graham saying: "I'm very fond of him. He can be difficult." "In what way?" A pause, then, "He quarrels with waiters." Can anyone ever have been so completely summed up in four words? (I can also remember being disappointed by Graham's lack of enthusiasm for Hardy's novels.) We discussed the merits of any female who crossed our path. Graham invented a new method of grading them, according to how many ships they would launch compared with Helen of Troy. "Four hundred?," "Twenty barges?," and other such sexist judgments. Another game was to pretend, when one saw a girl who looked attractive from the back, that one had committed oneself to an attempted seduction; then one looked at her from the front and decided whether or not one was glad that the commitment was only imaginary. I may add that Graham had no affairs, and attempted none, during our holiday, but this may have been because no one attractive and available presented herself. He spoke often and sadly of Anita, but also occasionally of Yvonne, a French lady whom he had met shortly before in the Congo and who in due course was to take Anita's place.

That summer of 1960 an extraordinary row blew up in Sweden over *The Complaisant Lover*. In the last act, the husband

goes out to the garage; the others wonder why he is so long there, and suddenly fear he may have gassed himself. Several Swedish writers who had been friends of Anita's husband Stig Dagerman were quick to point out that that was how he had died, and suggested that Graham had drawn the parallel deliberately, to wound either Anita or Stig's memory or both. In Sweden there was a good deal of envy of Graham for his having been Anita's lover. He wrote begging me to assure her that "nothing was further from my mind than to hurt her over the garage scene. After all, garage deaths are very common and there was no other form of playing with suicide that the husband could do. Anybody can sit in a car and imagine such a thing but you can't put cyanide in your mouth or a revolver in your ear without becoming melodramatic." Unlikely as it must seem to anyone who does not know Stockholm and the petty jealousies that exist in literary circles there (Strindberg, who suffered much from it, called envy "the Swedish vice"), it was rumored, I think falsely, that this antagonism was partly responsible for Graham failing to receive the Nobel Prize — not that this bothers him, for the ridiculousness of most of the awards has devalued the prize except in terms of money, which he does not need. He seems likely to join the distinguished list of writers whom the Swedish Academy has deemed unworthy of the prize since it was inaugurated in 1901, a roll-call that includes Tolstoy, Ibsen, Zola, Chekhov, Gorky, Strindberg, Hardy, Rilke, Henry James, Conrad, Frost, Proust, Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Nicholas Delbanco directs the MFA program in writing at the University of Michigan. His new book, *Running in Place: Scenes from the South of France*, a travel novel, was recently published by the Atlantic Monthly Press. A collection of stories, *The Writers' Trade*, is forthcoming from William Morrow in 1990.

Karen Latuchie's work has also appeared in the *Southwest Review*. She lives and works in New York City.

Bernard Malamud was born in Brooklyn, New York. His many works of fiction include *The Natural*, *The Assistant*, *The Magic Barrel*, published in 1958 and winner of the National Book Award, and *The Fixer*, published in 1966, which won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. He died in 1986.

François Maspéro founded and ran *La Joie de Lire*, a celebrated bookshop in Paris's Latin Quarter. He also published the political and literary review *Partisans* from 1962 to 1974. His novels include *Le Sourire du Chat* and *Le Figuier*. **David Bellos** is a faculty member of the University of Manchester. His translation of Georges Perec's *W* or *The Memory of Childhood* was published this year, and his translation of Perec's *Life: A User's Manual* (Godine) won the 1988 I.B.M. translation prize. He is currently writing a study of the life and work of Georges Perec. His translations of Maspéro's work will be published in 1991 by New Amsterdam Books.

Amor Towles was born in Boston and currently resides in Massachusetts. This is his first published story.

POETRY

David Bottoms's poems have appeared in such magazines as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *The Paris Review*, as well as in numerous anthologies. His first book, *Shooting Rats at the Bibb County Dump*, won the 1979 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets. He is also the author of two other poetry collections, *In a U-Haul North of Damascus* and *Under the Vulture-Tree*, and a novel, *Any Cold Jordan*, and is co-editor of *The Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*. His most recent book, *Easter Weekend* (Houghton Mifflin), is scheduled for release this winter.

George Bradley's poems have appeared in many magazines, including *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *The Paris Review*. His book, *Terms to Be Met*, was published as part of the Yale Series of Younger Poets in 1986.

Karen Fish teaches creative writing at Loyola College in Baltimore. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The American Poetry Review* and elsewhere. Her first book of poems, *The Cedar Canoe*, was published last year by the University of Georgia Press.

Amy Gerstler is a poet and fiction writer living in Los Angeles. Her eighth book, *Bitter Angel*, will be published by North Point Press in February, 1990.

Albert Goldbarth's latest book, tentatively titled *Popular Culture*, recently won the Ohio State University Press Poetry Award for 1989, and will be published by that press next year.

Wayne Koestenbaum's poems have appeared in *Under 35: The New Generation of American Poets* and in *Poets for Life: 76 Poets Respond to A.I.D.S.* He was co-winner of the 1989 Discovery/*The Nation* contest. He teaches at Yale and is the author of a critical study of male literary collaboration, *Doubletalk*, published by Routledge.

David Lehman is the author of *An Alternative to Speech*, a collection of poems (Princeton University Press), and the editor of *Ecstatic Occasions, Expedient Forms*, a poetry anthology (Macmillan). He writes for *Newsweek* and lives near Ithaca, New York.

Les A. Murray was born in 1938 and grew up on a dairy farm on the northern coast of New South Wales, Australia. He publishes in the United States with Persea Books. His latest book is *The Daylight Moon*.

Cynthia Nadelman's poetry has appeared in *The Paris Review* and *5 AM*, and an essay and one of her poems are forthcoming in a special issue of *Pequod* devoted to art. She is a critic and a contributing editor of *ARTnews*.

Molly Peacock's latest volume of poetry is *Take Heart* (Random House, 1989). She is a learning specialist at Friends Seminary in New York City and serves as President of the Poetry Society of America. She was recently awarded a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship.

Georges Perec was born in 1932 and is the author of many books, including *W or The Memory of Childhood* and *Life: A User's Manual*, both published by Godine. Known to many as the author of a weekly crossword puzzle in

Le Point and as a radio and television figure, he was awarded the Prix Renaudot in 1966 and the Prix Medicis in 1978. Perec died in 1982. **Harry Mathews** is the author of five volumes of poetry, including *Armenian Papers*, and six works of fiction, including the novel *Cigarettes*, published in 1988 by Weidenfeld and Nicolson. He divides his time between Paris and New York City, and is Paris editor of *The Paris Review*.

Robert Pinsky's book of essays, *Poetry and the World*, was published last year. His most recent book of poems, *The Want Bone*, is scheduled for publication this spring by Ecco Press.

Barbara Wuest's work has appeared in *The Paris Review*, the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and the *Cincinnati Poetry Review*. She also received third prize in Lincoln College's 1987-1988 Billee Murray Award Competition. She is currently teaching and writing.

FEATURE

Michael Meyer is a biographer, scholar and man of letters, widely known for his translations of Ibsen and Strindberg. His most recent book, *Words Through a Windowpane*, which will be released in November by Grove Weidenfeld, describes his encounters with London's literary community, including W.H. Auden, Vita Sackville-West and Sir Laurence Olivier.

INTERVIEWS

Douglas Allen is the co-author of *Shaker Furniture Makers* (University Press of New England). He resides with his wife and sons in Chatham, N.Y. A speech and scriptwriter by trade, Allen is currently working on a second novel and has just completed a screenplay, with Randy Fisher, for a vampire movie.

John Glusman is editor-in-chief of Collier Books, and a senior editor of Charles Scribner's and Sons. A member of Helsinki Watch, he has published in many newspapers, magazines and journals throughout the country.

Mona Simpson is the author of *Anywhere but Here* and is an advisory editor to *The Paris Review*.

ART

Martin Kippenberger was born in Dortmund, West Germany, in 1953, and lives in Cologne. His work has been exhibited recently at Galleria Juana de Aizpuru, Madrid; Metro Pictures, New York; and Galerie Gisela Capitan, Cologne.

Robert Marigold was born in North Tonawanda, New York, in 1937. His work has been exhibited at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Steve Wolfe was born in Pisa, Italy, in 1955, and lives in New York. His paintings were recently shown at the Diane Brown Gallery, New York.

Robert Phelps, who was a contributing editor of *The Paris Review*, died in New York on August 3rd. Geniuses were often born very early in the morning, he once observed, and in his own case a genius of sorts died at that hour—it was at about 6 AM.

A critic and essayist as well as editor and a co-founder of Grove Press, he was best known for his work in French literature and his name is intimately associated with that of Colette. Among his many books about her is the incomparable autobiography, *Earthly Paradise*, which he wrote, one might say, with her help and she with his. He also, with Peter Deane, edited *The Literary Life*, a unique album of the first fifty years of the century.

He embodied, both physically and in his view of literature, a kind of saintliness. His voice and nature were very pure. I remember him once noting, with great pleasure, that he could walk from his Paris hotel to the Seine without once traveling on a street not named for a writer.

—James Salter

The Paris Review is pleased to announce that:

- Edna O'Brien is the winner of the 1989 John Train Humor Prize for her story "Dramas."
- Joyce Carol Oates's story "Heat" and T. Coraghessan Boyle's story "The Ape Lady in Retirement" have been selected for the 1990 *O. Henry Prize Stories* collection.
- Charles Baxter's story "Westland" has been selected for the 1989–1990 *Pushcart Prize* anthology.

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Managing Editor

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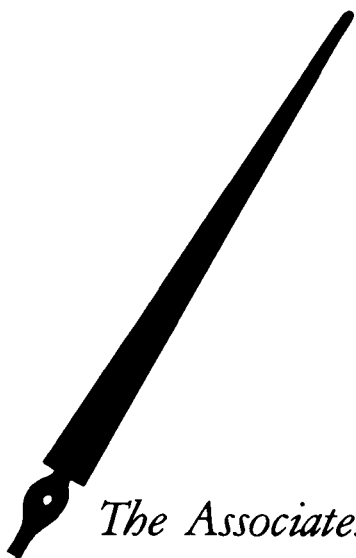
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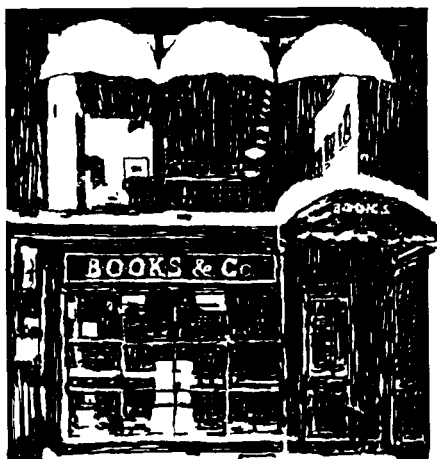


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—Gustave Flaubert,
in a letter, 1858

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